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**Postsouthern Cartographies:**  
**Capital, Land and Place**  
*from **The Moviegoer** to **A Man in Full***

by Martyn Bone

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, October 2001



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## ABSTRACT

This thesis takes a historical-geographical materialist approach to the capitalist production and literary representation of “place” in the American South between the 1960s and 1990s. Part 1 provides literary-historical and theoretical context. Chapter 1 considers how the Agrarians and their literary critical acolytes defined the “sense of place” of “Southern literature.” However, the chapter also recovers an aspect of Agrarianism suppressed by later Southern literary critics: the critique of modern (finance) capitalist abstraction expressed through the Agrarians’ “proprietary ideal.” Drawing also on postmodern theory, Chapter 2 theorises a *postsouthern* literary theory of place.

Part 2 analyses the “postsouthern turn” in novels by Robert Penn Warren, Walker Percy and Richard Ford. Chapter 3 argues that, in *A Place to Come to* (1977), Warren interrogates his earlier Agrarian aesthetics of place. In Percy’s *The Moviegoer* (1961), land speculator Binx Bolling constructs a rhetorical contrast between “the South” and “the North” to repress his fear that capitalist development is destroying New Orleans and its environs. Chapters 4 to 6 argue that, in *A Piece of My Heart* (1976), *The Sportswriter* (1986) and *Independence Day* (1995), Ford has offered the most sustained and sophisticated critique of the Southern literary critical “sense of place.”

Part 3 focuses upon recent literary representations of Atlanta. Chapter 7 provides a contextual assessment of Atlanta’s “non-place” in “Southern literature” and its development as a postsouthern “international city.” Chapter 8 considers the representational politics of “creative destruction” in Anne Rivers Siddons’ *Peachtree Road* (1988). Chapter 9 considers the role of land speculation, global capital flows and finance capitalist abstraction in Tom Wolfe’s *A Man in Full*

(1998). The final chapter demonstrates how Toni Cade Bambara's novel about the Atlanta Child Murders, *Those Bones Are Not My Child* (1999), indicts capitalist abstraction through a grotesque body politics of place.

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## PREFACE

It is a truth universally acknowledged that “the South” and “Southern literature” have been characterised by a “sense of place.” By 1996, the Natchez-born novelist Ellen Douglas could note, with an air of bemused scepticism, that “Southern writers of fiction and poetry and the critics and academics of the literary world have been talking for a couple of generations about ‘Place’ and ‘the Sense of Place.’” “Place, Sense of” has been so integral to Southern literary and cultural discourse that it was deemed worthy of its own entry in the monumental *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (1989). Historian Charles Reagan Wilson made a valiant attempt to explicate the ubiquitous, but usually undefined, concept.<sup>1</sup>

In this thesis, I take a historical-geographical materialist approach to the capitalist production and literary representation of “place” in the American South between the 1960s and the 1990s. But I begin by taking a lengthy backward glance at the Agrarians. This might not seem altogether original, given that Southern literary scholars have so often discussed the Agrarian group, and almost as frequently distilled their own arguments through Agrarian ideas. However, it is precisely the way in which the Agrarians and their neo-Agrarian literary-critical acolytes defined--or, to paraphrase Michael Kreyling, *invented*--Southern literary “place” that I am really interested in. I suggest that, even now, our Southern literary-critical conception of “place” derives substantially from the Nashville coterie’s idealised vision of a rural, agricultural society. More importantly (and more interestingly), I seek to recover an aspect of Agrarian “place” theory that has been ignored or suppressed in later Southern literary criticism: what historian Paul Conkin calls the Agrarians’ “proprietary ideal.” After 1930, the Agrarians

increasingly conceived Southern place as agricultural real property, apotheosised in the subsistence farm. The Agrarians believed that the rescue and wider realisation of this proprietary ideal offered the South's last best hope for surviving the vicissitudes of modern (finance) capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

However, this increased emphasis upon the economics of place--upon the relationship between "capitalism and land," as John Crowe Ransom termed it--has serious repercussions, not only for the fate of Agrarianism itself, but also for "Southern literature" and Southern literary criticism.<sup>3</sup> For the logic of the proprietary ideal implies that, if subsistence farming fails--if the South's agrarian society capitulates to a money economy, finance capitalist land speculation, and large-scale real estate development--then the South's unique sense of "place" expires too. In the second half of Chapter 1, I consider Allen Tate's Southern literary criticism circa 1935-1959, demonstrating how it is informed by exactly this sense that, as contemporary capitalism *displaced* agricultural real property in the 1930s, so both "the South" and "Southern literature" were doomed.

How, then, did "sense of place" thrive as a key concept of Southern literary criticism during and after the 1950s, and on notably Agrarian terms? In Chapter 2, I show how and why different literary critics negotiated varying "neo-Agrarian" conceptions of "place." While Louis D. Rubin upheld an idealised "image" of the South, Walter Sullivan and Thomas Daniel Young took the grim logic of Tate's eschatological paradigm to its doom-laden limit. Of course, no critical reassessment of Southern literary and critical conceptions of place could ignore Eudora Welty. In the second part of Chapter 2, I assess Welty's own intervention in the discourse upon place, particularly through her critical essays "Some Notes on River Country" (1944) and "Place in Fiction" (1956). Just as important,

though, is how and why critics have appropriated Welty's aesthetics of place--or, to borrow Richard Godden's term, her "aesthetics of anti-development"--in order to support and perpetuate a particular neo-Agrarian sense of "the South."<sup>4</sup>

But in whatever guise, (neo-) Agrarian Southern literary criticism has been conceptually unable, and ideologically unwilling, to consider seriously the material, geographical redevelopment of the region, and the related representational shifts in fiction. As such, while Chapter 1 excavates the *original* Agrarian critique of capitalist property relations because it resonates still in the social and literary situation of our own (post-) South, I conclude Chapter 2 by theorising a more contemporary, less reactionary approach to reading "postsouthern cartographies." I survey and critique recent literary-critical work on the "postsouthern" before arguing that a historical-geographical materialist approach can help us to recover the relation between postsouthern literature and the social reality of "place(lessness)" in a late capitalist post-South. I conclude Part 1 by suggesting how the recent interdisciplinary boom in theories of place--as evinced in the work of Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, Edward Soja and others--might be usefully applied to the postsouthern situation.

Parts 2 and 3 of the thesis are (Chapter 7 excepted) devoted to detailed analysis of eight novels published between 1961 and 1999. In Chapter 3, I begin with a relatively brief reading of a text by one of the original Agrarians, Robert Penn Warren's *A Place to Come to* (1977). I argue that Warren's last novel can be defined as a postsouthern, parodic interrogation of such foundational concepts as "the South," "Southern literature" and "sense of place." In *A Place to Come to*, Agrarian signifiers and aesthetics of place or anti-development no longer hold. I explicate how Warren punctures neo-Agrarian nostalgia for agricultural real



property by depicting not only the post-1930s decline of farming, but also the way in which farming has become a forum for the conspicuous *performance* of “Southernness” by upper-class socialites and academics. I also demonstrate how, through the narrator Jed Tewksbury’s relationship to South Dakota and Chicago, Warren deconstructs the familiar Agrarian and Southern literary critical binary opposition between “the South” and “the North.” This theme links *A Place to Come to* with Walker Percy’s *The Moviegoer* (1961). In this brilliant and complex novel, the narrator Binx Bolling initially embraces a postsouthern, suburban sense of place outside his family’s historical geography, New Orleans’ Garden District. This is not least because Binx himself is a land speculator. However, despite his own involvement in the speculative development of suburbia, Binx becomes seriously perturbed by the capitalist production of postsouthern geographies. I demonstrate how Binx uses an excursion to “the North”—specifically, Chicago—to recover an ideal “South,” and to repress his fear that capitalist development is destroying that ideal.

Chapters 4 to 6 focus upon the Mississippi-born novelist Richard Ford. This may seem disproportionate, but I mean to demonstrate that, over the course of twenty years and three significant novels, Ford has offered the most sustained and sophisticated critique of established notions of “the South” and its supposed “sense of place.” In Chapter 4, I offer an (in my opinion) much-needed, in-depth reading of one of Ford’s most neglected books, *A Piece of My Heart* (1976). Ford consciously conceived this debut novel as an attempt to supersede the standard assumptions and parameters of “Southern literature.” When *A Piece of My Heart* was dismissed as an exercise in “neo-Faulknerism,” Ford decided that he would never again write a novel set in the South. Going against the critical grain (to the

extent that there is one), I argue that *A Piece of My Heart* parodies William Faulkner's Southern literary geography. More than that, though, the novel challenges class-based assumptions about Southern place through its representation of the itinerant labouring lives of its central protagonists. In order to explicate fully the relationship between class, labour and place, I compare *A Piece of My Heart* to *The Moviegoer*.

Chapter 5 is devoted to Ford's breakthrough book *The Sportswriter* (1986). Ford gets beyond the (literary and geographical) limits of *A Piece of My Heart* and "Southern literature" itself by relocating his narrator, Frank Bascombe, from Mississippi to New Jersey. I argue that *The Sportswriter* can be read in part as a satire on the privileged "placeness" afforded "the South" (over and above "the North") by Binx Bolling in *The Moviegoer*, and in Walker Percy's work in general. However, I also reveal that Frank reads and writes his world as a text that blithely fails to query the production of place and socio-spatial relations in postsouthern, capitalist America. Drawing on Joseph Urgo's incisive analysis of the relationship between "land and literary speculation" in Faulkner's life and work, I explicate an equivalence between Frank's financial speculations in New Jersey real estate, and his textual-philosophical speculations in a certain way of seeing, writing and being in the world. I proceed to demonstrate how this complacent worldview is severely destabilised when Frank encounters geographical uneven development and social inequality during a trip to Detroit and, later, while driving across New Jersey.<sup>5</sup>

In 1995, Ford published a second Bascombe novel, *Independence Day*. In Chapter 6, I argue that, in *Independence Day*, and through his new job as a realtor, Frank finally achieves a sophisticated understanding of capitalist property relations--not least the fetishisation of "place" as a commodity. I demonstrate

how Frank's postsouthern "sense of place" reconfigures Welty's canonical definition of that term, and problematises Donald Davidson's Agrarian conception of place as the antithesis of a "mere real estate development." Finally, I discuss Frank's revised theory of independence as a socio-spatial practice that facilitates his own self-placement in postsouthern America.<sup>6</sup>

Part 3 of the thesis is devoted to an analysis of the socio-economic geographies and literary representations of Atlanta. In Chapter 7, I provide a contextual assessment of Atlanta's historical-geographical development as an aggressively capitalist, "New South" city, and consider how and why this has contributed to Atlanta's anomalous status--what I call its "non-place"--in the canonical (neo-Agrarian) cartography of "Southern literature." In the first half of Chapter 7, I provide brief but close readings of capital, land and place in three earlier Atlanta fictions: Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936), Flannery O'Connor's "The Artificial Nigger" (1955), and Donald Windham's *The Dog Star* (1950). I demonstrate how Scarlett O'Hara's postbellum simulation of Tara's Old South sense of place is entirely dependent upon her role in the literal "reconstruction" of New South Atlanta--the redevelopment of the city's real estate. As I note in Chapter 9, this economic and spatial nexus between a Georgia plantation and Atlanta real estate anticipates Tom Wolfe's *A Man in Full*. I then show how "The Artificial Nigger" maps the racial and economic construction of Atlanta's built space from the perspective of the story's rural protagonists. However, I argue that, like Mitchell (albeit for different reasons), O'Connor interrogates the anti-urbanism of the Agrarian "sense of place." Donald Windham's fine debut not only has been neglected by Southern literary critics, but also overshadowed by "the Atlanta novel," *Gone with the Wind*. For my purposes,

*The Dog Star* is fascinating and valuable because it maps the “creative destruction” of inner city Atlanta in the 1930s. As such, it establishes a theme that is central to my arguments in the subsequent chapters.

In the second half of Chapter 7, I consider the emergence since the 1960s of what I term the postsouthern “international city.” I sketch the scale of capitalist investment in, and redevelopment of, Atlanta, and the city’s entry into the “space of flows” (Manuel Castells) of global financial exchange. I conclude that Atlanta’s burgeoning status as a global capital of capital calls for a new, *postsouthern* theoretical approach to the city and its narrative representation. This approach should range from the local to the global: from the creative destruction of Atlanta’s material geography, to what Doreen Massey has termed a “global sense of place,” a wider perspective that takes into account the city’s more abstract role in the globalisation of capital flows.<sup>7</sup>

In Chapter 8, I analyse Anne Rivers Siddons’ “popular” historical novel, *Peachtree Road*. I argue that it powerfully depicts the shift from the “New South” city of the 1930s to the postsouthern metropolis of multinational capital and mixed-use developments of the 1960s to the 1980s. However, Siddons’ novel constructs a distinctly idealised, and ideological, vision of the city’s historical-geographical development. I demonstrate that *Peachtree Road*’s selective rendering of Atlanta is driven by a hagiographic image of the white, upper class, civic-corporate “power structure” that presided over the city until the early 1970s. This ideological bias is manifested in Siddons’ representation of inner city “urban renewal” in the 1960s, and the large-scale commercial redevelopment of Atlanta--under local black political leadership--in the 1980s.

In Chapter 9, I turn to Tom Wolfe's *A Man in Full* (1999), a novel that drew attention to Atlanta like nothing since *Gone with the Wind*. I consider how the novel represents the role and scale of capitalist land speculation and real estate development through the actions and perspective of its protagonist, the developer Charlie Croker. Drawing on Jameson, I demonstrate how, in *A Man in Full*, capitalist abstraction--as mediated through mixed-use developments, and as manifested in the finance capitalist "space of flows"--produces a "sense of placelessness," a feeling that, in Marx's seminal phrase, "all that is solid melts into air." However the novel also encompasses what I term "underground Atlanta(s)," those less glamorous loci that exist within or on the borders of the "international city." I consider how *A Man in Full* uncovers the harsh realities of class and labour that survive in the postsouthern metropolis, and how the novel identifies the immigrant population of "Chambodia" as an alternative "international" Atlanta.<sup>8</sup>

In the last chapter, I assess Toni Cade Bambara's posthumously published *Those Bones Are Not My Child* (1999), the author's epic meditation upon the Atlanta Child Murders of 1979-1981. Like Wolfe, Bambara focuses upon the power of capitalist abstraction in the "international city," and maps the tensions between the global and local--Atlanta's global economic status, and local, material realities of socio-spatial inequality. Through a grotesque body politics of place, Bambara scathingly critiques the economic imperative and definition of "international" Atlanta, and refocuses our attention upon the dead and disappeared children. Finally, I show how Bambara pans out from such local politics of place, centred on the neighbourhood and the body, to resituate "international" Atlanta within a world-system of inequality and exploitation. In doing so, *Those Bones Are Not My Child* takes us toward a critical, global sense of place.

## **Part One**

# **Capital, Land and Place from Agrarianism to Postsouthernism**

## CHAPTER ONE

### “Not a Mere Real Estate Development”: Capital, Land and the Agrarians’ Proprietary Ideal

In “The Irrepressible Conflict,” his contribution to *I’ll Take My Stand* (1930), historian Frank Owsley wrote that “[w]hen America was settled, the tradition of the soil found hospitable root-bed in the Southern colonies, where climate and land combined to multiply the richness of an agrarian economy [...] Thoughts, words, ideas, concepts, life itself, grew from the soil.” Here, Owsley presents a South at one with Nature. The “richness” of the region’s “agrarian economy” fairly burst forth from the South’s fecund loam. However, the Agrarians never—any more than the early colonists Owsley describes—“discovered a ‘natural’ order” in the South’s physical geography. As Michael Kreyling has observed, they constructed it themselves. The Agrarian invention of “the South” is often as notable for what it excludes as for what it includes. For example, when Owsley refers to Southerners’ “endless enjoyment of the fruits of the soil,” he elides the harsh slave labour very often involved in farming such “fruits.” If Owsley is to maintain his image of an organic, “natural” society, this elision is a structural and ideological necessity.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout *I’ll Take My Stand*, both slavery and postbellum race relations jeopardise the attempt to construct “the South and the Agrarian Tradition” as natural. John Crowe Ransom attempts to slide smoothly from “the social organization” of “squirearchy” into the supposedly natural relations of master and slave: “people were for the most part in their right places. Slavery was a feature

monstrous enough in theory, but, more often than not, humane in practice.” In “The Briar Patch,” Robert Penn Warren provides rhetorical sanction for racial segregation by arguing that “the small town and farm” was the natural, even biological-metaphysical, “place” for “the Southern negro.” Warren concludes: “That is where he still chiefly belongs, by temperament and capacity; there he [...] is likely to find in agricultural and domestic pursuits the happiness that his good nature and easy ways incline him to as an ordinary function of being.” Ransom and Warren’s essays exemplify the pernicious way in which, as Charles Reagan Wilson has noted, “southern whites [have] frequently used *place* to indicate the status of blacks.”<sup>2</sup>

The Agrarians’ “natural” rhetoric also failed to obscure what Richard Gray has called the “doubleness” running through *I’ll Take My Stand*’s representation(s) of “the regional tradition.” The Twelve Southerners various ideas of “the South” are divided between the antebellum plantation and, more usually, the yeoman farm--and in some cases, an unconvincing admixture of both. Stark Young claims that “our traditional Southern characteristics derive from the landed class.” This class sympathy led Young to confront the thorny issue of slavery even more explicitly than Ransom; he acknowledged that “we are talking largely of a certain life in the Old South, a life founded on land and the ownership of slaves.” In stark contrast to Young, who damns the “respectable and sturdy” yeomanry with faint praise and scorns the “shiftless” poor whites, Andrew Lytle sees the South’s man at the centre as the small farmer. Somewhere in between, Cowsley describes a South that, presumably by virtue of being “close to the soil,” could naturally encompass both the plantation *and* the small farm.<sup>3</sup>



Whatever the fraught and flagrant problems regarding the place of race (or the race of “place”), and however difficult the farm/plantation dichotomy, there was one overriding reason why *I’ll Take My Stand* invented “the South” along these lines. The Agrarians feared modern capitalism’s impact upon the region. In this opening chapter, I argue that Agrarian images of Southern “place” were conceived primarily as a bulwark against capitalism and the threat it posed to the region’s relatively stable, largely rural social geography. Especially after *I’ll Take My Stand*, the Agrarians constructed their “South” as a site of resistance to capitalism’s destruction of “place” through land speculation, real estate development, urbanisation and industrialism. Taking a cue from historian Paul Conkin, I want to recover the Agrarians’ specific, *economic* vision of “place” as agricultural real property. Increasingly in the 1930s, the Agrarian sense of place was of a rural, self-sufficient and nigh-on pre-capitalist locus focused upon the small farm, operating with only a very limited cash nexus, and absent of large-scale land speculation. As Conkin observes, this “proprietary ideal” is an important element of Agrarianism that “has received scant attention from historians and literary critics.”<sup>4</sup>

## I

### *Agricultural Real Property: the Agrarian Aesthetics and Politics of Anti-Development, 1930-1940*

The anti-capitalist impulse informing the Agrarians’ naturalisation or construction of “the South” becomes more transparent when one considers, as Gray does, how their rhetoric opposes an “organic,” “spontaneous” and “rooted” region to the “artificial, mechanical” characteristics of an urban, industrial society.

Whether this latter society is seen as the North or the New South, it is said to deny “all bonds and connections other than the economic.” In a typical example, *I’ll Take My Stand’s* introductory “Statement of Principles” contrasts the South’s culture of the soil with “nature industrialized, transformed into cities and artificial habitations, manufactured into commodities [...] no longer nature but a highly simplified picture of nature.”<sup>5</sup>

Through this overarching antipathy to a city-centred “industrialism”--“Agrarian *versus* Industrial,” in the introduction’s basic binary opposition--the Twelve Southerners’ various images of a rural, agrarian South attain a certain cohesion. Yet the Agrarians rarely criticise capitalism *per se* in *I’ll Take My Stand*. Ransom identifies a “poverty of the contemporary spirit [...] located at [society’s] economic base,” but attributes it to “industrialism.”<sup>6</sup> The reason is that the Agrarians were not absolute anti-capitalists. They were against industrialisation, urbanisation and land speculation as manifestations of (in Richard King’s words) “the modern economy of industrial and financial capitalism.” As King observes, while the Agrarians were “not explicitly anticapitalist,” they took their stand against modern capitalism through the vision of “an agrarian order based upon personal private property and held together by the co-operation of planter and yeoman.”<sup>7</sup>

In *I’ll Take My Stand*, Owsley’s antebellum agrarian society is a place “where land, water, and timber were practically free.” The cash nexus and land speculators were not merely absent: they were not required. It is in this sense--as part of a non-speculative, land-centred South contrasting with contemporary capitalist property relations--that the Agrarians could celebrate the plantation *alongside* the small farm, in the process obscuring the divisive “doubleness” *between*

the planter and yeoman farmer. Mostly though, *I'll Take My Stand's* anti-industrialism is filtered through a celebration of the farmer's "place" in the South. For all that Ransom cites a hierarchy of "right places," he finally focuses upon the yeoman and his "farm or native province." Ransom expresses his concern that this "substantial" but small-scale form of Southern social relations will be abstracted out of existence in the marketplace: "a pile of money, a volume of produce, a market, or a credit system. It is into precisely these intangibles that industrialism would translate the farmer's farm."<sup>8</sup>

The Southern small farmer is most celebrated, and the antipathy to capitalist (not just "industrial") land speculation is most explicit, in Andrew Lytle's "The Hind Tit." Lytle advocates subsistence farming as the South's last, best hope of remaining outside a "money economy" that threatens to transform landowning farmers into mere tenants, "abstract selves" ripe for exploitation by the "absentee-landlordism of capitalism." Lytle even expresses disdain for the Southern planter, arguing that antebellum cotton snobs who "bought freely from England and the North" were responsible for opening the South to a money economy. According to Lytle, this led to "the yeoman South, that great body of free men, [who once] had hardly anything to do with the capitalists and their merchandise," losing their farms to land speculators and absentee landlords. The second section of "The Hind Tit" is the symposium's most strident attempt to evoke everyday life in an agrarian locus outside the cash (or credit) nexus, and beyond the scope of land speculators. Richard Godden has brilliantly explicated Lytle's detailed description of sallet, an authentic Tennessee country crop (as opposed to "the fancy-tin can salads" of "industrialism"), in terms of a "Southern aesthetic of anti-development" whose "magic defends it from capitalist rationality." A similar

magical--or mystifying--aesthetic informs Lytle's aphoristic celebration of corn as an anti-commodity that situates and apotheosises the subsistence farm and its sense of place: "A farm is not a place to grow wealthy; it is a place to grow corn."<sup>9</sup>

Lytle's call to resist the "absentee-landlordism" of real estate speculators through subsistence farming testifies to what Godden calls the Agrarians' "literary preoccupation with land ownership." There are other less obvious examples of this preoccupation elsewhere in *I'll Take My Stand*. Owsley suggests that the Old South felt an affinity with the Roman farmers "of the early republic, before land speculators [...] had driven men from the soil to the city." The implication is that an even more onerous form of their spiritual ancestors' fate threatens self-sufficient Southern farmers in 1930. Meanwhile, Herman Nixon describes how the Civil War had "destroyed real-estate values, not only with serious damage to pre-war owners, but with a consequent jungle of speculation, promotion and 'booms.'" Nixon warns that "[t]he South's passive indifference to industrialism is not adequate to withstand realtors' activities" and that, "unless the traditional leanings toward agrarianism are reinforced," the shift in the "Southern perspective toward a bourgeois materialism" will be irreversible.<sup>10</sup>

It is debatable whether such images of a traditional agrarian South--or perhaps more pertinently, Agrarian images of "the South"--standing firmly rooted against the abstracting, displacing tendencies of capitalist land speculation had any historical basis. In *Old South, New South* (1986), economic historian Gavin Wright points out that Southern slaveowners were *human* capitalists: their investment was concentrated chiefly in slaves, rather than land. As such, many slaveholding planters were in fact highly mobile; pace Stark Young, they were only secondarily "founded on land." Wright comments that "[t]his is the economic essence of the

distinction between real and personal property, slaves almost always having been classified as the latter [...] Slavery generated a weaker and looser connection between property holders and the land they occupied.” Wright argues that, because “[s]laveholding farmers and planters moved from place to place so often they seldom had time to sink roots,” so “the passionate southern attachment to the soil” must be regarded as “a post-Civil War phenomenon.” What is more, Wright posits that any postbellum attachment to the soil was grounded in the *economic* shift from human property to real property. Because emancipation destroyed human capitalism, so landowners (large *and* small) turned to “raising land yields and land values in particular localities.” Whereas Lytle sees the shift from subsistence farming to cash cropping as a pernicious influence of an unnatural, non-Southern money economy, Wright notes that this change--usually from corn to cotton--resulted from “the effort of landlords to raise the value of their land’s product.” Whereas Owsley implies that “land speculators” threatened a supposedly pre-capitalist, property-based, rural “South,” Wright insists that, after 1865, both farming and town building were basically real estate ventures. Owsley presents the speculators as outsiders; Wright reveals that these ventures were initiated by Southern landowners themselves, and designed to boost the value of their own real estate. All told, *Old South, New South* helps reveal how *I’ll Take My Stand*’s history of Southern property relations is, to put it mildly, selective.<sup>11</sup>

It can be argued--as we shall see in Chapter 2, it *has* been argued by Louis D. Rubin, the leading Southern literary critic--that the divergences between *I’ll Take My Stand*’s “South(s)” and historical-geographical reality are irrelevant. One might argue (as Rubin does) that the Agrarians’ image of their region is a poetic

form of polemic. However, there is a fundamental problem with this point of view. After *I'll Take My Stand* appeared, the Agrarians went on to formulate a far more programmatic sense of Southern place concentrated upon the kind of small, subsistence farms evoked in "The Hind Tit." As Paul Conkin has observed, "[o]ut of this would develop a true agrarian program, one tied to land reform and property restoration. In the most precise use of the terms, a southern agrarian movement was born only in 1933 and burned itself out over the next four years." In answer to Scott Romine's pointed question--"were farms necessary [to] the Agrarian mythology of place"?--I would suggest that they were, very much so, as the centrepiece of what Conkin calls the "proprietary ideal." Romine rightly notes that the Agrarian critique of capitalism could never countenance a "causal relationship between base and superstructure" (it would have been perilously close to Marxism). Nonetheless, I want to emphasise that the Agrarian sense of Southern "place" was not only based upon vaguely religious "tropes of organic emergence," but also--and increasingly in the 1930s--included a defining economic element. Stung by accusations that they were merely academic, armchair agrarians, yet feeling vindicated by the Wall Street Crash, the political reconfiguration of Southern Agrarianism was tied to a more explicit critique of the destabilising, displacing influences of "finance capitalism" or "monopoly capitalism" (no longer merely "industrialism").<sup>12</sup>

In 1935, Donald Davidson admitted that "our programme for the farm was not much particularized in the book [*I'll Take My Stand*] itself." However, Davidson insisted, "most of the contributors, through whatever media have been open to them, in recent years have pushed the principles of agrarianism far beyond the point represented in *I'll Take My Stand*." In particular, Davidson

pointed to John Crowe Ransom, who “throughout 1930 and 1931 argued for a kind of subsistence farming.”<sup>13</sup> Ransom was indeed in the vanguard of the Agrarians’ programmatic turn. In 1931, he read some back-to-the-land books written during the early Depression, and was sufficiently inspired to write his own (ultimately unpublished) economic treatise, “Capitalism and Land.” In 1932, *Harper’s* printed Ransom’s article, “Land! An Answer to the Unemployment Problem.” Here, Ransom criticises “the substitution of the capitalistic or money economy for the self-subsistent or agrarian economy” during World War I. Again we might question the historical accuracy and ideological bent of such a statement. As Wright reveals, the “substitution” of cash crops for subsistence farming had been well under way since the end of the Civil War. Nonetheless, we see that Ransom’s rubric has altered to enable a more direct attack on contemporary capitalist land-use. Moving further away from his earlier “South” of hierarchical “right places,” Ransom emphasises the deleterious impact of “capitalistic farming,” with its excessive devotion to “money crops,” upon a “self-subsistent” way of yeoman farming. Rearticulating Lytle’s vision of small subsistence farms operating largely outside the cash nexus, “Land!” invokes “generations of men who [...] lived in what they often regarded as comfort and dignity on the soil without the use of a great deal of money.” Ultimately, Ransom calls for no less than an “agrarian agitation” intended to “re-establish self-sufficiency as the proper economy for the American farm.” If this form of socio-spatial relations would not be entirely pre- or anti-capitalist, it would be close enough.<sup>14</sup>

The varying Agrarian visions of “the South” were rapidly converging on the “proprietary ideal [...] land or other means of production under the full

managerial control of the individual owners.” If this had been implicit in *I’ll Take My Stand*, it now became, as Ransom’s “Land!” essay anticipated, absolutely central. In 1935, Frank Owsley published “The Pillars of Agrarianism,” in which he observes that “the real owners” of many Southern plantations “are the life insurance companies or the banks.” In order to safeguard “[s]ubsistence farming [as] the first objective of every man who controls a farm or plantation,” Owsley suggests that the state should offer landless tenants eighty acres and two mules (plus two cows and living expenses). Owsley adds that, if subsistence farming is to succeed, “[i]t must become impossible for land to be sold to real estate and insurance companies or banks.”<sup>15</sup>

The turn toward the proprietary ideal as a Southern bulwark against “the alienation of the soil”<sup>16</sup> by finance-capitalist land speculation is especially apparent in *Who Owns America?* (1936). This was a second symposium featuring eight of the original Twelve Southerners, Agrarian sympathisers George Marion O’Donnell and Cleanth Brooks, and some Distributists. *Who Owns America?* reveals just how comprehensively the Agrarians had excised Young’s aristocratic plantation in favour of Lytle’s small subsistence farm.<sup>17</sup> Much as “The Hind Tit” attacked *antebellum* planters for exposing the South to a “money economy,” O’Donnell’s “Looking Down the Cotton Row” criticises *postbellum* planters for “deserting the agrarian economy deliberately in order to share in the great profits of a money economy dominated by finance-capitalism.” Here, as throughout the volume, the small farm is often seen as a self-sufficient site of resistance to the cash nexus and finance capitalist land speculation. For O’Donnell, as for Lytle, an agrarian economy was not about profit: rather, it was “the economy of men who love the land and who derive their whole sustenance from it.” As such, it was best



expressed by the subsistent yeoman farmer who “possesses liberty based on property--the only true liberty.”<sup>18</sup>

In “The Small Farm Secures the State,” Lytle himself lays down the key tenet of the Agrarian proprietary ideal: “It [the small farm] is the norm by which all real property may be best defined.” Much as the agrarian South was shown to be more “natural” than urban, industrial society in *I’ll Take My Stand*, so in *Who Owns America?* self-sufficient farms, the apotheosis of real property, are more “real” than capitalist real estate. Once more, we might well refer to Wright and his observation that, in the postbellum South, all forms of real property were subject to intense speculation. As such, Lytle’s pre-capitalist norm was less a social reality than an ideal. Nonetheless, the Agrarians configured real property as the “concrete” antithesis of unnatural, “abstract” capitalist real estate. Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate’s contributions to *Who Owns America?* follow Lytle’s advice in full. Warren argues that “real property” guarantees “the relation of man to place,” unlike the “abstract property” relations of finance capitalism. Tate, too, refers to the “familiar, historical” small farm as “real private property.” A “thirty-acre farm in Kentucky” (the Southern, agricultural example is hardly accidental) is a “tangible” and “genuine” material geography. It stands in contrast to “giant corporate property,” which is very often not even real in any material sense, but something abstract, such as “a stock certificate in the United States steel corporation.” The stockholder’s tenuous relation to his property as a commodity on the market has replaced the farmer’s individual ownership of his land, and the use-value of that land. The farmer has been uprooted and alienated from his “stable basis” in agricultural society by a “finance-capitalism [that] has become [...] top-heavy with a crazy jigsaw network of exchange-value” This critique of

finance capitalist property speculation notably echoes Lytle's earlier attack on the "money economy" and "absentee-landlordism" in "The Hind Tit." The difference is that, like Ransom in "Land!," Tate attempts to go beyond the rhetorical binaries familiar from *I'll Take My Stand* (i.e., abstract "industrialism" versus concrete agrarianism) to engage with economics.<sup>19</sup>

By 1936, the Agrarians had developed a much more stringent critique of monopoly- and finance-capitalism, bolstering the attack with a more consistent argument for the restoration of subsistence farming. Explicitly emphasising the economic-geographic difference that distinguished the South (and other agrarian cultures) from urban, industrial America, the Agrarians were less inclined to recourse to hazy "natural" rhetoric. At one point in "Land!," Ransom notes wryly that "[i]t is tempting to write like a poet [...] about the aesthetic and spiritual deliverance that will come when the industrialized laborers with their specialized and routine jobs and the business men with their offices and abstract preoccupations become translated into people handling the soil with their fingers and coming into direct contact with nature." Such lines read like an ironic indictment of *I'll Take My Stand's* airy aesthetic of anti-development.<sup>20</sup>

However, the more rigorous, materialist focus put the Agrarian idea of the South in a perilous position. The programmatic turn in *Who Owns America?* implies that, if the redemption of the small farm fails, the distinctive South is doomed to death by finance capitalism. The Agrarian argument had reached a high pitch at which the contrast between a rooted, rural society and abstract, urbanising land speculation could not be reconciled, either poetically or practically. The contrast was perhaps put most succinctly (or simplistically) by Donald Davidson when he celebrated a society "securely established on the land [in] the stable community

which is really a community, not a mere real estate development." The South, with its supposed "relation of man to place," would survive on agricultural real property, or it would succumb to capitalist real estate development. There was no middle ground.<sup>21</sup>

For all the Agrarians' "desperate optimism," as Alfred Kazin once called it, their proposals were futile.<sup>22</sup> The Great Depression of the 1930s made the prospect of establishing a Jeffersonian republic of self-sufficient small farms bleaker than ever. In 1935, Owsley observed that "[t]he majority of the planters do not really own their lands; the real owners are the life insurance companies or the banks." Peculiarly, Owsley passed over the similar experience of his thrifty subsistence farmer.<sup>23</sup> In 1932 alone--the year Ransom published "Land!"--the twenty-six largest insurance companies in the country acquired 15,000 farms. A 1935 report by the Land Tenure Section of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics found that in the seven cotton belt states, "between 60 and 70 percent of the value of the farm real-estate belonged to persons or agencies other than the farm operator." These "persons or agencies" were usually credit companies, banks, and mortgage corporations.<sup>24</sup> Many of the Agrarians (notably Owsley and Ransom) had been cheered when, during the early New Deal, a Division of Subsistence Homesteads was established, leading to the foundation of thirty small, largely self-sufficient farming communities.<sup>25</sup> Yet, as Gavin Wright observes, New Deal benefit payments to impoverished small farmers "were of more value to more people than the lamented land distribution schemes could ever have been."<sup>26</sup> More generally, as Pete Daniel has discussed, the New Deal--whether in the form of the Resettlement Administration or its successors, the Farm Security

Administration and the Farmers' Home Administration--never really worked to turn displaced tenants into landowners, as Owsley had hoped. In fact, New Deal plans to save and revolutionise Southern agriculture focused upon larger, more efficient units of production, at the expense of small, subsistence farms.<sup>27</sup> Between 1940 and 1945, between twenty and twenty-two percent of the South's agricultural population, more than three million people, left the land. Between 1940 and 1950, the number of Southern farm operators declined by 350,000; between 1950 and 1959, this number plummeted by a further one million plus. All told, between 1935 and 1970, no less than thirteen million people abandoned the Southern agrarian way of life.<sup>28</sup> Donald Davidson later propagated the simplistic view that only during the New Deal did the "traditional society" ("poor in money and what money will buy, but rich in what money can never buy") accede to the cash nexus. Yet there is something to be said for Davidson's opinion that "it was not until the latter part of the Roosevelt administration that the South began to receive the full shock of modernism."<sup>29</sup>

I have focused upon *Who Owns America?* as much as the ostensibly more "Southern" *I'll Take My Stand* in order to emphasise the Agrarians' sense of crisis as rural, agricultural "place" became ever more exposed to the cash nexus, finance capitalist land speculation, and real estate development. I do not mean to suggest that, if the Agrarians' "South" died during the 1930s, the racialised sense of place sketched by Warren in "The Briar Patch" disappeared too. Moreover, it is highly debatable whether subsistence farming was really *the* peculiar institution that defined the South's agricultural identity until the 1940s. After all, during those decades there was another, arguably more significant shift in Southern socio-spatial relations: sharecropping was being replaced by wage labour, not least in the

burgeoning urban centres. Following Wright and Jon Wiener, Godden cites sharecropping, not subsistence farming, as “the South’s singular regime of accumulation.” For Godden, the end of sharecropping and the region’s low-wage economy destroyed “the basis of the region’s distinctiveness.” But whether one regards subsistence farms or sharecropping as the most distinctive or dominant form of Southern socio-spatial identity, both were less prevalent than ever circa 1940.<sup>30</sup>

In the late 1930s, most of the Agrarians abandoned any pretence to a practical Southern agricultural program. Tate, Warren and Ransom turned instead to creative writing and literary criticism, while Davidson tried to dismantle the political, practical element of Agrarianism that culminated in *Who Owns America?* In 1935, Davidson had insisted that “in recent years [the Twelve Southerners] have pushed the principles of agrarianism far beyond the point represented in *I’ll Take My Stand*” by positing “very specific proposals” focused upon subsistence farming and “government policies which would bring about a wide distribution of owned land.” But only four years later, Davidson was downplaying the “proper economics and politics” of *Who Owns America?* and insisting that, as in *I’ll Take My Stand*, “the emphasis is still upon principles rather than practice.” Davidson’s volte-face should not distract us from the specific economic and political bent of the Agrarian essays that appeared in the mid-1930s. Even if self-sufficient, agricultural real property was less a historical reality than an ideological invention, the Agrarians were seriously engaged with the socio-economic redevelopment of place in the South and the nation.<sup>31</sup>

However, I would suggest that, after 1936, not only Davidson was confronted by the burden of *Who Owns America?*’s logic. The failure to realise the

proprietary ideal implied that the South itself--in the Agrarians' own definition, an agrarian society of subsistent, even pre-capitalist real property surviving outside the cash nexus and beyond land speculation--must finally cease to exist as a unique entity. Arguably, this recognition prompted the general Agrarian turn away from the South to literature and criticism. Ransom, especially, changed course, going back not to the land, but to aesthetics. More generally, as Gray has trenchantly observed, those Agrarians who became New Critics sought "in works of literature [...] what they had once sought for in historical institutions: a harmonious system, an organism in which there was a place for everything and everything was in its place." Davidson was left alone to claim that "agrarianism in 1938 has no politics" even as his colleagues were abandoning the movement--their "very specific proposals" for real property rendered redundant by history.<sup>32</sup>

## II

### *Allen Tate, Flem Snopes, and the Last Years of "the South"*

As Agrarianism departs the political scene, it leaves me to pose an important question. If "the South" ceases to be a distinctive socio-economic geography, what happens to "Southern literature"? I want to turn again to Allen Tate for one possible and persuasive answer--not the Tate of "Notes on Liberty and Property," but Tate the (neo-) Agrarian literary critic. As Conkin notes, literary criticism was the mode through which Tate "continued to affirm his agrarian philosophy" from 1937 until his death. However, Tate's literary critical essays between 1935 and 1959 are informed by the sense that, as the cash nexus and land speculation finally overcame the resistance offered by agricultural real property, so the South did indeed die. What is more, Tate suggests that if

Southern literature flourished for as long as it represented and critiqued the capitalist redevelopment of the region, so it too expired with the death throes of the region's traditional, agrarian economy.<sup>33</sup>

In "The Profession of Letters in the South" (1935), Tate recapitulates certain "merits of the Old South" that are familiar from *I'll Take My Stand*: "its comparative stability, its realistic limitation of the acquisitive impulse, [and] its preference for human relations compared to relations economic." Like Owsley before him, Tate blithely ignores the "acquisitive impulse" driving land seizure by the original planter-settlers, the less-than-human relations of slavery, and the mobility of antebellum human capitalists and their "personal property." Echoing Lytle's corn-centred sense of place in "The Hind Tit," Tate asserts that "[a]n environment is an abstraction not a place; Natchez is a place but not an environment." So far so familiar, but the argument takes an unexpected turn when Tate observes that, for all the positives of life in the Old South, its *literature* was decidedly lacking. Tate disputes Ransom's essay of the previous year, "Modern With the Southern Accent," in which his fellow Fugitive-Agrarian put forward the particularly reactionary view that modernity per se was a disaster for the South. Tate effectively (if not explicitly) completes his counter-attack against Ransom by positing that the power of contemporary Southern writing derives precisely from the modern economic transformation of the region, as that process is mediated by the writers' "historical consciousness" of the South's traditional social relations.<sup>34</sup>

Yet there is another twist before the essay ends. It becomes clear that, whatever the "considerable achievement of Southerners in modern American letters," Tate remains distinctly antagonistic towards the capitalist redevelopment

of the region, and highly sceptical about its longer-term impact upon Southern literature. The contemporary Southern novelist may have “left his mark upon the age; but it is of the age [...] the focus of this consciousness is quite temporary.” Tate concludes by wondering gloomily whether the wellspring of modern Southern writing will be able to maintain its historical recall of pre-modern, even pre-capitalist place, or simply accede to “the prevailing economic passion of the age.” It is an appropriate conclusion to an essay that traces a metahistory of the literary artist’s removal from his “place” in a feudal, “organic society” to the mire of “finance-capitalism” and “the cash nexus” (Tate uses the latter phrase four times in the final third of the essay). Most importantly for our purposes, “The Profession of Letters in the South” reveals Tate’s serious doubts that Southern literature or the South itself can survive being “dominated by capitalism, or ‘economic society.’” This is a despondent denouement, not least considering it comes a year *before* his spirited attack on finance capitalism in *Who Owns America?*<sup>25</sup>

Tate’s perspective on the future of Southern letters is even more pessimistic in “The New Provincialism,” published in 1945--by which time the proposals outlined in the Agrarian-Distributist symposium must have seemed a mere pipe dream. The body of this essay argues that, in the modern period of Marxism and capitalism, “we have been the victims of a geographical metaphor, or a figure of space”--an ahistorical “provincialism,” in Tate’s titular term. According to Tate, “Utopian” world socialism and a globalised industrial capitalism are replacing regional economies. Put another way, provincialism has superseded regionalism, “that consciousness or that habit of men in a given locality which influences them to certain patterns of thought and conduct handed down to them by their ancestors.” Unsurprisingly, Tate cites the traditional South as an authentic site of



historical-geographical-economic regionalism that contrasts favourably with the world-systems of Marxism and capitalism. In an "Epilogue on the Southern Novel," Tate posits his famous theory that the South's "backward glance" resulted in "a literature conscious of the past in the present." He also recapitulates his earlier argument that "the peculiar historical consciousness of the Southern writer"--his or her awareness of the socio-economic transformation of the South itself--produced the literature of the Southern Renaissance. Tate concludes that, nearly ten years later, he finds "no reason to change that view."<sup>35</sup>

More interestingly, though, "The New Provincialism" also shows that Tate is even less certain than he was in 1936 that the Renaissance or the South itself has actually *survived* the seismic shift from regionalism to provincialism. In the very first paragraph, Tate asserts bluntly that "the Southern literary renaissance [...] is over." When Tate invokes his "traditional" and "classical-Christian" South of "regional consciousness" and "limited acquisitiveness" it *contrasts* with the "corrupt [...] South today," a New South of "cynical materialism." The "backward glance" to a better time and place--to a historical and regional consciousness--may have been available at the end of World War One, but not, it seems, at the end of World War Two. The cumulative effect is of one Southern writer's sense that "the South" no longer serves as a social reality guaranteeing the relation of man to place.<sup>37</sup>

In "A Southern Mode of the Imagination" (1959), Tate again talks of the Southern Renaissance in the past tense. He invokes the usual Agrarian image of the Old South as a "premodern" and "preindustrial society [that] meant, for people living in it, that one's identity had everything to do with land and material property, at a definite place, and very little to do with money." Critiquing the

socio-spatial transformation (decline) of this society, Tate cites the “dislocated external relations” of modern characters in the fiction of Faulkner and Lytle, “men who had missed their proper role, which was to be attached to a place.” Finally, Tate observes tartly that “Southern literature in the second half of this century may cease to engage the scholarly imagination; the subject may eventually become academic, and buried with the last dissertation.” Tate is implying that Southern literature can no longer engage our interest because, unlike Faulkner and Lytle, emerging writers do not have the historical consciousness to gauge the destruction of the South (let alone an unmediated knowledge of the premodern place itself). Never mind Southern literature, even Southern literary criticism becomes, at best, a retrospective affair.<sup>38</sup>

I do not want to challenge Tate’s (or Donald Davidson’s) belief that the Southern Renaissance flourished within the context of the region’s social destruction and redevelopment.<sup>39</sup> Aside from Tate’s examples, Renaissance fiction furnishes abundant examples of the socio-economic transformation of older Southern geographies. In a brilliant essay, Joseph Uργο reveals how “a series of land transactions regarding a single piece of property effectively structures [Faulkner’s] *The Hamlet* [1940] along a real-estate continuum.” Uργο argues that Flem Snopes works to performatively invest the Old Frenchman’s Place with a fictional, inflated exchange-value, and that this process culminates in the highly profitable transfer of the property to Armstid, Ratliff and Bookwright.<sup>40</sup> However, one might add that, confronted by capitalist speculation in, and despoliation of, the rural South, Faulkner himself was not averse to indulging a neo-Agrarian “aesthetic of anti-development.” Richard Godden identifies the inverted delta

symbol in *Go Down, Moses* (1942) as Faulkner's iconic site of resistance to the economic violation of the Mississippi Delta. This gendered icon, complete with hymen and pudenda, "preserve[s] the impenetrability of the land as it isolates the land within a natural female function."<sup>41</sup> In a similar fashion, Eula Varner in *The Hamlet* becomes a gendered figure of Southern virgin land. When Flem Snopes tries to possess Eula through patriarchal marriage and the "power of money," it becomes analogous to his ownership of "a field [...] the fine land rich and fecund and foul and eternal." However, having always rejected the "exchange value" and "puny asking-price" of male love in general, so even after the marriage Eula remains "impervious to him [Snopes] who claimed title" on her personal (and personified real) property. Faulkner's neo-Agrarian fantasy is that, if Eula is never penetrated (possessed) by Flem, so too the small farm South will--at some sublimated sallet- or hymen-like level--remain impervious to the voracious land speculation and crude credit system of "Snopesism."<sup>42</sup>

In a 1946 review-essay on Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren concurred that "nature can't, in one sense, be 'owned.'" Warren cites approvingly the way in which Eula, "a kind of fertility goddess or earth goddess," repudiates Flem's philosophy of "ownership." Warren also quotes at length Ike McCaslin's theory (in "The Bear") that land ownership through the cash nexus has, at some metaphysical or religious level, forever *dispossessed* mankind from the land. Faulkner's aesthetic of anti-development (and anti-ownership) must have seemed enticing to the lapsed Agrarian. Indeed, Warren works hard to distinguish the small farmer from Flem Snopes, emphasising "the assault made on a solid community of plain, hard-working small farmers by Snopeses and Snopesism."<sup>43</sup> Like many other critics, Warren fails (or refuses) to recognise that Will Varner

hardly offers a pre- or anti-capitalist “alternative to Snopesism.”<sup>44</sup> Like “the sole owner and proprietor” of Yoknapatawpha himself, Warren finds solace in Faulkner’s literary South in the very period that Agrarian proposals for a return to subsistence farming--and hopes for any kind of rural, small-farm economy--were being rejected, or simply ignored.

However, Faulkner knew better than to hold to a neo-Agrarian aesthetics of anti-development. He could not simply refuse to represent the reality of socio-spatial change. As such, we witness the transformation of “the entire old Compson place” in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and again in *The Mansion* (1959), by which time “the bulldozer and the dragline [c]ould not only alter but efface geography.” The Compsons’ old homestead has been radically redeveloped as Flem Snopes’ subdivision, Eula Acres, complete with a “new arterial highway” and a “filling station.” *The Hamlet’s* gendered aesthetic of anti-development has failed: posthumously, the “eternal” earth goddess Eula has finally been “claimed” by Flem--as the “title” of a real estate development.<sup>45</sup>

A writer rather less favoured by the Agrarians, Thomas Wolfe, also critically represented the speculative redevelopment of the South’s social geography. Much as Urgo relates Faulkner’s real-estate aesthetics to the author’s other role as a property owner in Oxford, Richard Reed has traced “Real Estate in *Look Homeward, Angel*” back to Wolfe’s mother’s “relentless speculation” during the property boom and bust in and around 1920s Asheville. To the degree that “Wolfe employed real estate for the value of its contrast to the life of the spirit,” he echoed the Agrarian aesthetic of anti-development. Yet unlike the Agrarians or even Faulkner, Wolfe’s fiction focused upon the speculative development of an *urban* South. Coming home again, George Fairchild observes how:

Everyone bought real estate; and everyone was “a real estate man” either in name or practice [...] Along all the streets in town the ownership of the land was constantly changing; and when the supply of streets was exhausted, new streets were feverishly created in the surrounding wilderness; and even before those streets were paved or a house had been built upon them, the land was being sold, and then resold, by the acre, by the lot, by the foot, for hundreds of thousands of dollars.<sup>46</sup>

One could add more examples from the literature of the Renaissance, but that is not my main point here. Instead, I want to conclude this chapter by emphasising the devastating implications of Tate’s literary critical essays for “the South,” “Southern literature” and the supposed Southern (literary) “sense of place.” As we have seen, Tate sees the “real” (“real property”) South as a premodern, almost precapitalist, agricultural society. Yet, as early as 1935, Tate is stating that such a society no longer exists, except in the collective memory of Southern Renaissance writers. By 1945, Tate is suggesting that the representational authenticity, even the very possibility, of “Southern literature” ended with the Renaissance—itsself valued precisely for its vivid, doom-laden depiction of the South becoming displaced, de-realised, by capitalist redevelopment. Come 1959, Tate dismisses even the *study* of contemporary (post-Renaissance) Southern literature.

All this raises two or three very important questions. If we consider that Tate, nonpareil in his influence as an Agrarian and Southern literary critic, sounded the death knell of “the South” and “Southern literature” in 1935, 1945 and 1959, how did Southern literary studies flourish, on distinctly Agrarian terms, during and after the 1950s? Why did the term “sense of place” begin to appear in

Southern literary criticism in 1961? And why was this “sense of place” almost always figured as positive and benevolent, in contrast to Tate’s own devastating assessment (in 1959) of the “dislocated external relations” of Renaissance men who have become detached from “place”? To be sure, it is tempting to cite Hegel’s maxim that “the owl of Minerva spreads his wings only with the falling of the dusk”—that we cannot comprehend a historical period until it is coming to a close. From this, one might proceed to argue that Southern literary critics of the 1950s and 1960s were simply struggling to understand and define “the South” and “the Southern Renaissance” in the aftermath of the time and (sense of) place itself. However, I want to suggest that the issues are rather more complex, and ideological. With reference to the decline and death narrative that drives Tate’s essays, Romine has identified “an overdeveloped eschatological sense” informing “the southern literary tradition. The southernness of place, it seems, is always in danger of expiring.” Always in danger—yet “sense of place” endures as an organising, even foundational idea of Southern literary studies. In Chapter 2, I argue that one reason for the survival of a markedly “neo-Agrarian” sense of place is that not all Southern literary critics have confronted the socio-economic logic of Tate’s eschatological paradigm. I will try to show how and why certain Southern literary critics maintained a neo-Agrarian “image” of a rural, small-town “South”—even as the material transformation of the region reached levels the Agrarians could only have imagined when they wrote *Who Owns America?*<sup>27</sup>

## CHAPTER TWO

### (Re)inventing the (Post)southern “Sense of Place”

Fred Hobson has identified “the origins of modern southern literature as an academic discipline in a volume published in Baltimore in 1953, *Southern Renaissance*, edited by Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs.” Hobson goes further, positing that, by defining a canon of modern Southern literature, “Rubin and Jacobs, nearly as much as Faulkner and Tate and Warren, were ‘responsible’ for the ‘Southern Renaissance.’” While I concur with Hobson’s perceptive remarks, I would add that a backward glance to *Southern Renaissance* reveals not only the “responsibility” of Rubin and Jacobs themselves, but also the continuing critical influence of the Agrarians. *Southern Renaissance* reveals just how important Tate et al were to what Michael Kreyling has called the invention of Southern literature. Two of the original Agrarians, Andrew Lytle and Donald Davidson, actually contribute essays. As the preface acknowledges, Davidson also had a hand in choosing other contributors. The most prominent heir to Agrarianism, Richard Weaver, is featured, and there are up to ten other pieces that deal with the Agrarians as artists and/or critics.<sup>1</sup>

In “How Many Miles to Babylon,” Andrew Lytle restates his unreconstructed stand: “Twenty years is a short time as history goes, but I see no reason to withdraw the assumption upon which the Agrarians based their writings.” True to his word, Lytle reheats the anti-industrial, pro-farm property thesis expounded in “The Hind Tit” and “The Small Farm Secures the State.” Yet as we saw in Chapter 1, even ten years--from 1930 to 1940--was “short time”

enough to revolutionise the socio-economic geography of the South. There is the strong sense that Lytle is harping upon a received Agrarian idea of the region, rather than referring to any social reality. In the first part of this chapter, I demonstrate how, after 1953, not only original Agrarians like Lytle, but also neo-Agrarian literary critics, promulgated an increasingly anachronistic and idealised image of “the South” and Southern “place.” In particular, I will consider the critical work of Rubin, co-editor of the epochal *Southern Renaissance*. I also assess another strand of neo-Agrarianism, exemplified in the work of Walter Sullivan and Thomas Daniel Young, that took Tate’s eschatological paradigm to its logical conclusion. In contrast to and even in open conflict with Rubin, Sullivan and Young mourned the death by capitalism of the South, and offered a requiem for Southern literature—a literature that, they believed, could no longer claim to refer to any agrarian (or Agrarian) reality.<sup>2</sup>

## I

### *Inventing Southern Literature’s “Sense of Place”*

Given the general neo-Agrarian tenor of *Southern Renaissance*, it is ironic that the two essays which foreground “place” appear to diverge from original Agrarian ideas of the South and the Southern Renaissance. Hobson observes that *Southern Renaissance* “played a great part in establishing a canon—Faulkner, Wolfe, Warren, Welty, Tate, O’Connor, Gordon, and so forth.”<sup>3</sup> It is thus notable that H. Blair Rouse’s “Time and Place in Southern Fiction” deals with writers who, as Rouse himself notes, are not “considered extensively elsewhere in this symposium”: Erskine Caldwell, Paul Green, DuBose Heyward, Julia Peterkin, T.S. Stripling, and others. However, Rouse rounds on these (generally politically liberal) writers for



depicting “place” as mere “backdrop”: “Probably more Southern fiction than is generally realized is ‘placed’ in the South in this sense.” Rouse cites Faulkner and Warren, in particular, for a truer sense of (time and) place.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Rubin contributes an essay entitled “Thomas Wolfe in Time and Place.” If, as Hobson suggests, *Southern Renaissance* canonised Wolfe as a “Southern writer,” this was a point at which the volume--and Rubin in particular--diverged from Agrarian orthodoxy. Kreyling has observed that this essay “argues for the ‘desegregation’ of the fledgling modern southern canon to accommodate Rubin’s hero.” Yet Rubin configures Wolfe as a Southern writer within recognisably Agrarian parameters, lauding Wolfe for a sense of rhetoric, a sense of time, and an antipathy toward abstraction. When it comes to place, Rubin remains vague, failing to get beyond Rouse’s opposition between those who merely use the South as setting, and those--“Faulkner, Wolfe, Gordon and others”--who make their work “rich and sensuous” through the ‘textual composition of place.’<sup>5</sup>

More interesting, but also more problematic, is Richard Weaver’s contribution, which recapitulates the familiar Agrarian ideal of a “natural” South that resists the cash nexus and finance capital. The reader is assured that it is a “blessing that the South has never had much money” because “it has retarded the spoiling of the South.” Because capital has been concentrated in the land itself (like Owsley and Tate before him, Weaver elides the human capitalist relations of slavery), the region’s “rural working people” have avoided the “peculiar degenerative effects of the possession of wealth” and kept “in close contact with the natural environment.” In rhetoric echoing Lytle’s pithy aphorisms and Ransom’s rigid binary oppositions, Weaver contrasts this organic, natural, almost pre-capitalist South with the artificial, abstract, finance-capitalist North: “whereas

the South has the farms, New England has the insurance companies." The problem is that Weaver's essay seems as anachronistic as Lytle's: the work of a latecomer *reinventing* an Agrarian "South" that, in the wake of the region's socio-economic transformation during the 1930s and 1940s, seems more rhetorical than ever. Weaver claims that "words are among the fixed things which has kept the South conservative," by contrast with the modern, moral peril lurking in the gap "between the word and the thing signified." But by attaching his own words to old Agrarian tropes, it is Weaver's "South" that seems to signify nothing in present social reality. As we shall see, Lytle and Weaver were not the last (neo-) Agrarian critics whose "South" has seemed largely rhetorical.<sup>6</sup>

In 1961, the Rubin-Jacobs editorial axis presided over *South: Modern Southern Literature in Cultural Setting*. In an important introduction, Rubin and Jacobs recognise that it has become necessary to reconsider the South and its literature within the context of the region's social, spatial and racial transformations. To their great credit, and unlike the original Twelve Southerners, Rubin and Jacobs criticise the "place" that blacks occupied in this "old, agrarian society": "hewers of wood and drawers of water, to till the fields and wait upon table and otherwise perform the role of a peasantry." They also observe that "with the passing of segregation there must also pass important features of a pattern of life based upon a fixed, closely knit rural and small-town society," replaced "by a cosmopolitan, fluid industrial society in which social status and economic stratification are constantly changing." The editors conclude on this striking note:

to the extent that the Southern novel has always presupposed a strong identification with a place, a participation in its life, a sense of intense involvement in a fixed, defined society, the best work of the leading

younger Southern writers is not in these respects "Southern." Just as the South has changed until it has lost much of its old, closely knit, small-town and rural character, so its most recent novelists have lost their sense of community, of involvement within a limited, bounded universe. The kind of community that was Yoknapatawpha County, created by a known and felt history, marked off into distinct, recognizable parts, each with its proper function and its proper relationship to the others, is gone. Towns have become cities, cities have become huge metropolises [...] Now the fixed center is gone, and the younger Southern writers, as Walter Sullivan declares, must look for something else to take its place.<sup>7</sup>

If there is a tinge of neo-Agrarian nostalgia for Tate's premodern South of "people in their "proper role [...] attached to a place" (one notes the simplistic suggestion that everyone and everything in Faulkner country is each in its ordered place), nonetheless this is a radical conclusion. Like Tate's own literary critical essays, the introduction to *South: Modern Southern Literature in Cultural Setting* seems to have profound implications for the South and Southern literature. Rubin and Jacobs appear as witnesses, even doomsayers, of the fate that Tate foretold. As the small-town and rural South, with its "strong identification with a place," becomes extinct, so too dies "Southern literature"--as we have known it. At the very least, the co-editors concur with Walter Sullivan; a coherent, "fixed" and "rooted" literature has been severely *displaced*.

Yet Rubin and Jacobs' definition of "place"--both of what Southern place was, and what that "something else to take its place" will be--remains rather airy. To the extent that the traditional South is seen as "small town and rural in character," and as threatened by racial desegregation and "cities" and "huge

metropolises,” there are clear echoes of the Agrarian worldview. However, Southern place is not given the specific identity that it was by the Agrarians between 1931 and 1936: agricultural real property owned and operated by subsistence farmers. It is only in a general sense, then, that Rubin and Jacobs confirm the implication in *Who Owns America?* and Tate’s essays that Southern place will cease (has ceased) to exist as a distinctive entity. I want to suggest that this failure (or refusal) to focus upon the socio-economic processes and property relations that destroyed the agrarian South (or the Agrarians’ “South”) later allowed Rubin and other neo-Agrarian critics to maintain a *literary-critical* “image” of Southern “place,” even in the midst of massive *socio-spatial* change.

Before I proceed, however, I want to conclude my brief assessment of *South: Modern Southern Literature in its Cultural Setting* by noting that it was here that the phrase “sense of place” emerged as a distinctive signifier in and of Southern literary studies. And appropriately enough, Frederick Hoffman’s essay “The Sense of Place” exemplifies the Southern literary critical failure to refer to contemporary, socio-spatial reality. Hoffman echoes Owsley in *I’ll Take My Stand* and Weaver in *Southern Renaissance* by suggesting that “[t]he history of the Southern place is essentially one of human agreements made with nature.” This hoary Agrarian rhetoric effectively sidelines the editors’ introductory emphasis on the place of race/race of “place” in Southern history--not least racial segregation circa 1961. More than that, “The Sense of Place” never refers to the original Agrarians’ sense of place through agriculture, let alone subsistence-based real property in particular. Hoffman’s “South” is not merely precapitalist or premodern: it is prelapsarian.<sup>8</sup>

It takes the following essay, James Dickey's "Notes on the Decline of Outrage," to expose the complacency of Hoffman's ahistorical Arcady. Dickey reemphasises and explicates the semantic and social problems with "place" that Rubin and Jacobs identified, and which Hoffman elided. Dickey does admit his distaste for "the empty money-grubbing and soul-killing competitive drives of the Northern industrial concerns" that threaten "the *sense* of this place," the rural South. However, he rejects outright the possibility that "the South [could], in fact, have remained a farming region." The subsistence farm is no longer a (proprietary) ideal, let alone a reality. What is more, Dickey sees contemporary white Southern identity as based solely upon the effort to keep the black Southerner "in *his* 'place.'" For Dickey in 1961, all that remains of Robert Penn Warren's briar patch is its racist sense of "place."

*Louis Rubin's neo-Agrarian image of the South*

Around this time, Harper and Brothers was planning to republish *I'll Take My Stand*, and commissioned Louis Rubin to write a new introduction. Rubin begins by noting that the symposium had long been out of print (indeed, the 1962 printing was the first since the original edition), and acknowledges that "[i]n the years that followed *I'll Take My Stand's* publication, the South and the nation cannot be said to have heeded its economic, political and social counsels to any startling effect." By sketching the extent to which the South has been transformed--"[t]he importance of farm life in the South has steadily diminished" such that "today one-half of all Southerners live in an urban environment"--Rubin again reveals his readiness to confront the changing historical and geographical reality of the region. On the other hand, Rubin is anxious to emphasise what he

believes to be the continuing value of *I'll Take My Stand*. Focusing upon "the four leading Fugitive poets"--Ransom, Warren, Tate and Davidson--Rubin argues that:

as poets they were given to the metaphor, and they instinctively resorted to an image for their critique of American society. They saw in the history of their own section the image of a region which had clearly resisted the domination of the machine, persisting in its agricultural ways [...] and only now beginning to capitulate fully to the demands of American industrial society.<sup>10</sup>

Here, we encounter a dilemma that is, as Kreyling has observed, recurrent in Rubin's Southern literary criticism: an attempt to reconcile the harsh realities of the region's "history" with a frankly neo-Agrarian "image" (the term is Tate's) of "the South." Having openly acknowledged the historical and geographical realities that seem to have rendered redundant *I'll Take My Stand's* representation of a rural, self-sufficient agrarian society, Rubin yet sets out to rescue the Agrarians' "South" as a poetic "image" of an anti-materialistic, anti-industrial "good life." Kreyling remarks that, for Tate and the other original Agrarians, "[i]mages constitute the vocabulary of the stable, traditionalist, religious community," but that such "images do not bond well with the contingent grammar of history." In Rubin's 1962 introduction, this tension between "image" and "history"--and between "image" and material, historical "place"--becomes apparent in an oxymoronic phrase like "the tangible image of the South." Rubin valorises the Agrarians' representation of the South because it is rooted in a "tangible" historical geography, yet he also admits that "[t]he image of the old agrarian South in *I'll Take My Stand* was the image of a society that perhaps never existed." Rubin thus concedes that the "agrarian South" was less a historical, material reality than

(to use that word the Agrarians loathed) an abstraction. A phrase like “tangible image” cannot resolve rhetorically this historical-geographical dilemma. Later, Rubin posits that “[t]he image of the agrarian South provided the essayists with a rich, complex metaphor, giving body to their arguments. anchoring their perceptions in time and place.” Again, “the agrarian South” is both a poetic construct and an actual, spatio-temporal entity. Ultimately though, the putatively material “anchor” becomes subservient to the Agrarian--or perhaps more pertinently, Rubin’s own--poetic figure. As with history, so too “place” melts into image and metaphor. The historical-geographical South gives way to the imag(in)ed South.<sup>11</sup>

A fundamental problem here is that Rubin elides the original Agrarians’ own programmatic, economic emphasis--their focus upon agricultural, subsistence-based real property. This is notable because, were Rubin to refer to the proprietary ideal, a (neo-) Agrarian “South” would seem even more anachronistic in 1962 than it did in 1930 or 1936. Rubin himself reconsidered this dilemma in 1977, in a second introduction to *I’ll Take My Stand* (for another new edition published by Louisiana State University Press). This time around, Rubin acknowledges openly that it was “misleading” to stress “the ‘metaphoric’ element of *I’ll Take My Stand*.” He recognises “that at the time the book was being written the [Agrarian] enterprise was envisioned as a literal and practical program, a specific course of action” by Davidson, Owsley and Nixon. Rubin also observes that Ransom turned to “agrarian economics” after the publication of *I’ll Take My Stand*. Most notably of all, Rubin confesses that no less an original Agrarian authority than Davidson strongly criticised the 1962 introduction for focusing

upon the poetic “image” rather than “a literal and practical program, a specific course of action.” Rubin retrospectively explains his motives in 1962:

There was the chance, even the likelihood, that, as in the early 1930s, the obvious impracticalities of a return to subsistence farming in the age of the tractor, the supermarket, and the television set [...] might serve to distract the symposium’s readers from what was and is the book’s real importance: its assertion of the values of humanism and its rebuke of materialism.<sup>12</sup>

Having made this confession, Rubin reasserts his original opinion that “a return to a preindustrial farming society was unfeasible, but that this was the least of what the Agrarians had to say.” However, this is still misleading. As we saw in Chapter 1, the Agrarians came to believe that getting back to the farm was feasible--more than that, it was *crucial*, to save the South itself. By 1936, “a return to subsistence farming” provided the focus for *most* of what the Agrarians had to say. As in 1962, and as on a number of other occasions, Rubin elides the Agrarians’ more practical initiatives as he attempts to redeem the “concrete imagery” of the Agrarians’ “South” as a more general rebuke to “the social effects of capitalism and industrialism.” As Michael O’Brien has pointedly observed, “*I’ll Take My Stand* was edited into a metaphor, as though John Ransom had never written that party politics were necessary”--or, one might add, that small farms were necessary.<sup>13</sup>

Paul Conkin likely had Rubin in mind when he suggested that the literary critical focus upon *I’ll Take My Stand* has distorted our understanding of Agrarianism. Whereas Rubin repeatedly focuses upon image and metaphor in that famous first symposium, the Agrarian movement of the 1930s, with its political program to transform the “proprietary ideal” into practical reality, “has received



scant attention from historians and literary critics.” We have tended to define as “neo-Agrarian” those literary critics like Weaver and Hoffman who depict a traditional, even static image of “the South” and its “sense of place”: rural, agricultural, even “natural.” I do not want to dispute this definition of neo-Agrarianism, for there is a clear link to what Frank Owsley and others were doing in *I’ll Take My Stand*. However, even Rubin’s ostensibly more historical neo-Agrarian perspective has obscured that political Agrarian strain that came to the fore in “Land!” and *Who Owns America?* Eudora Welty once appreciatively termed Rubin a “mapmaker [...] able to invent, to reinvent, a country.” Inadvertently, Welty’s words now seem to allude to Rubin’s role in “inventing southern literature”—and more specifically, in mapping a metaphorical (aesthetics of) place that fails to attend to the Agrarians’ own emphasis on agricultural real property.<sup>14</sup>

There is another problem lurking within Rubin’s (neo-) Agrarian “image” of the South.” For as well as failing to focus upon the Agrarians’ proprietary ideal itself, this image does not take into account the profound implications of this ideal. As we saw in Chapter 1, the most devastating implication that emerges from *Who Owns America?* and from Allen Tate’s Southern literary criticism is that, if finance capitalism defeats the proprietary ideal, the South itself ceases to exist as a distinct social geography. However, there is another strand of neo-Agrarian literary criticism that, taking Tate’s eschatological paradigm to its logical conclusion, argues more or less explicitly that “the South” (and “Southern literature”) did, in fact, die along with the agrarian society itself. Walter Sullivan and Thomas Daniel Young best represent this perspective. In the late 1960s and 1970s, Sullivan in particular engaged Rubin in an ongoing debate over the current status—indeed, the survival—of “the South” and “Southern literature.”

*Walter Sullivan, Thomas Daniel Young and the Tate paradigm*

Like Tate's, Walter Sullivan's focus is more religious than economic or geographic. Citing "Notes on the Southern Religion" ("that essay which remains astonishingly vital after more than forty years"), Sullivan too laments the South's failure to formulate an appropriate theology. However, also like Tate, Sullivan finds some secular solace in the region's traditional agrarian makeup, and in the "farmer's way of looking at reality." Sullivan accepts the traditional view "on southern regionalism and the sense of place [articulated] by Louis Rubin, Robert Heilman, Richard Weaver, Frederick Hoffman, and many other critics," and notes that such critics took their cue from the Agrarians. Yet, when Sullivan sketches what he sees as the neo-Agrarian, Southern literary critical perspective, it actually diverges somewhat from both Rubin's metaphorical "South" and Hoffman's "natural" sense of place:

[I]t has been our custom, and rightly so, following some of the most perceptive critics of our time, to think of the South in which the Southern Renaissance was rooted largely in Agrarian terms. The people, being farmers, had lost the Civil War, and therefore they knew about the tragedy of life: living close to the land, they understood the inscrutable quality of providence. Dealing with mules and boll weevils rather than with stocks and bonds, they had a firmer grip of reality than their city counterparts.<sup>15</sup>

As this passage suggests, Sullivan's own neo-Agrarian sympathies are more closely identified than Rubin's or Hoffman's with that particular emphasis (in "The Hind Ti:" or "Land!" or "Notes on Liberty and Property") upon the small subsistence farm as a site of resistance to finance-capitalism. In this, Sullivan once more follows Tate. Resigned in the belief that the South's religion is

fundamentally flawed, he shifts at least part of his emphasis to economics: from the transcendent-metaphysical to the historical-geographical. In both *Death by Melancholy* (1972) and *A Requiem for the Renaissance* (1976), much of the Tate-like burden of Sullivan's argument is that only with the material survival of the farmer's reality could the South--and by extension, Southern literature--survive. As the evocative, even apocalyptic titles suggest, Sullivan feels that Southern literature *has* perished along with the agrarian South itself.

In his essay "Allen Tate, Flem Snopes, and the Last Years of William Faulkner," Sullivan initially is more positive. He suggests that, at the end of *The Hamlet*, and despite their exploitation by Flem Snopes, the small farmers of Frenchman's Bend are "redeemed by love." Indeed, this is more optimistic than my own or Joseph Urgo's readings of *The Hamlet* through real estate speculation (see Chapter 1). However, Sullivan subsequently argues that the shift in focus from Frenchman's Bend to Jefferson in *The Town* and *The Mansion* is fatal for an agrarian society based on rural, agricultural real property. Sullivan states adamantly that "Jefferson is not the country, and even in a small town, land and livestock lose their significance, property tends toward abstraction, and the symbol becomes not the farm or the house but the bank." Not only does the Snopes trilogy depict the destruction of "the agrarian community" by abstract finance-capitalism, but also it reveals Faulkner's fateful displacement from the source of his best fiction. Unlike Warren in 1946 (before *The Town* and *The Mansion* appeared), Sullivan does not have recourse to some Agrarian-Faulknerian aesthetic of anti-development that might magically (i.e., fictionally) save the South. Rather, Sullivan's view that small farmers have failed to resist Snopesism seems to conform to and confirm the ominous prophecy of the original Agrarians in *Who*

*Owens America?*: that finance capitalism sounds the death-knell of Southern agricultural real property.<sup>16</sup>

Sullivan asks: "But what happens when the old procedures of the land are reduced by mechanized farming, and the woods are destroyed by the lumber companies, and the city establishes its hegemony over the countryside?" That Sullivan even views the small town (Jefferson) as a danger to the "agrarian community" rather makes this a rhetorical question. By 1972, the wide-ranging and deep-reaching process of regional redevelopment to which Sullivan alludes had long been underway. In 1940, when the Agrarians were finally abandoning their advocacy of the proprietary ideal, 65% of the population of the South remained rural (as opposed to 36% in the non-South). By 1960, "over half of the [Southern] population were living in cities"; come 1970, the figure had reached 65%. In 1940, 36% of Southern labour remained agricultural; by 1960, the figure had plunged to 10%. Of course, these are the kind of sociological indices that the Agrarians--Davidson especially--loathed. Nevertheless, by 1971 sociologists John McKinney and Linda Borque could justifiably observe that there was now "far stronger" evidence to support the 1936 view of Davidson's nemesis, Howard Odum, that "[t]here is no longer any single entity which may be designated as 'the South.'" To the large extent that their own ideal came to focus upon agricultural real property, the Agrarians would have been forced to agree that "the South" *did* die some time between 1936 and 1971.<sup>17</sup>

The revolutionary nature of these socio-spatial changes drives Sullivan's relentless decline and death narrative. Moreover, Sullivan's Tate-ian eschatology brought him to literary critical loggerheads with Louis Rubin. This disagreement is explicitly announced in the preface to *Death by Melancholy*, and noted by Michael

Cass in the foreword to *A Requiem for the Renaissance*.<sup>18</sup> The debate over the continuity (Rubin) or destruction (Sullivan) of “the South” and “Southern literature” also arose during a 1972 conference session in Chapel Hill. During that discussion, Thomas Daniel Young sided with Sullivan, similarly positing that “the sense of community you’re talking about, as we see it in Frenc[is] Bend, is the last vestige of this kind of unity.”<sup>19</sup> In *The Past in the Present* (1981), Young again echoes Sullivan by taking Tate’s paradigm as his main tool for a bleak assessment of the contemporary South and modern Southern fiction. Young’s debt to Tate is apparent in the very title, and he regurgitates various Agrarian arguments throughout the book. But Young’s neo-Agrarianism is notably similar to Tate’s or Sullivan’s in that, almost in spite of the critic’s metaphysical beliefs, it takes a more materialist turn. Young’s claim that Southerners “placed great emphasis on land and material property, on a definite place, and very little on money” is drawn straight from Tate’s portrayal of Kentucky in “A Southern Mode of the Imagination.” Young also utilises “The Hind Tit” to portray place as the loamy locus that substantiates Lytle’s iconic anti-commodity: “Land is not a place, as Lytle has noted, where one grows wealthy; it is a place where one grows corn.” More generally, if less explicitly, Young’s vision of place seems to be related to the proprietary ideal of pre- or anti-capitalist subsistence farming portrayed by the original Agrarians in the mid-1930s. Ultimately, Young follows Sullivan by presuming that industrial- and finance-capitalism has seriously damaged, if not totally destroyed, the South’s “emphasis on land and material property, on a definite place.” This feeds directly into Young’s mournful conclusion that “[m]uch of contemporary literature, in the South as elsewhere, is a literature of no specific place.”<sup>20</sup>

Shortly I will assess the implications of Sullivan and Young's Tate-like arguments for contemporary Southern literature. However, I want to mediate my argument through a brief consideration of the way in which Eudora Welty's oft-cited "sense of place" has been adopted and adapted by Southern literary critics, including Sullivan.

*Aesthetics of Place, or Aesthetic of Anti-Development?: Eudora Welty*

There is an auspicious moment in "The Sense of Place" when Frederick Hoffman quotes from Eudora Welty's essay "Place in Fiction" (1956). Hoffman hereby inaugurates a Southern literary critical tradition in which this essay in particular, and Welty's work as a whole, has become the classic explanation and exemplar of the Southern "sense of place." As James Justus has observed, "Place in Fiction" has been second only to "The New Provincialism" as "the revered text that ratified the critical consensus." It is not a little ironic, then, that Welty herself sounds a note of scepticism at the start of "Place in Fiction," identifying place as only "one of the lesser angels" of literary production. Nonetheless, in "Eudora Welty's Sense of Place" (another *South: Modern Southern Literature in Cultural Setting* essay based on a piece from *Southern Renaissance*), Robert Daniel concluded that "[t]he presiding genius of her work is her sense of place." So what exactly constitutes Welty's "sense of place"--or perhaps more pertinently, the *critics'* sense of Welty's "sense of place"?<sup>21</sup>

Arguably, it is not a literary critic but a historian, C. Vann Woodward, who established a markedly neo-Agrarian conception of Weltyan place. In the seminal essay "The Search for Southern Identity" (1958), Woodward cites his friend Robert Penn Warren's argument that Southerners have a "fear of abstraction." He

then proceeds to cite Welty's "experience" as the Southern antithesis of a standard American "insignificance of place, locality, and community." In this now-familiar formulation--recapitulated as recently as 1994 in Jan Gretlund's "common-sense reading"--Welty's "sense of place" takes its stand against abstraction. However, Woodward never considers the opposition between "abstraction" and "place" in the specific form that the Agrarians themselves conceived it in the 1930s: the opposition between the abstract property relations of finance-capitalism, and agricultural real property that guarantees (as Warren once stated it) "the relation of man to place." To put it another way, Woodward figures Welty's sense of place in vaguely neo-Agrarian terms, but avoids the Agrarians' proprietary ideal. This is not to score Woodward for failing to identify, in those few influential paragraphs, the Agrarians' specific mid-1930s focus upon subsistence-based small farms. It is simply to cite Woodward as the most famous of many (mostly literary) critics who have configured the Weltyan "sense of place" along Agrarian lines, without acknowledging that it might be an anachronistic, even dead idea.<sup>22</sup>

Neither "Place in Fiction" nor the essay in which Welty first used the term "sense of place," "Some Notes on River Country" (1944), refers directly to the radical socio-spatial transformation of the South during the period they were written. To be sure, "River Country" does make the tentative closing claim that "[p]erhaps it is the sense of place that gives us the belief that passionate things, in some essence, endure [...] regardless of commerce." Yet one might argue against Welty that the economic decline of Rodney's Landing that "River Country" describes precisely proves that "place," and the practice of place in everyday life, is profoundly influenced by the "vagrancies" of capital. Arguably, it is the *withdrawal* of capital that has left the unpopulated "natural" landscape that Welty

rhapsodises in terms approaching the pathetic fallacy. Given the transformation of the South in the 1940s, one might even ask whether "River Country" indulges not only what Gretlund calls an Agrarian "aesthetics of place," but also (to cite Richard Godden again) the Agrarians' "aesthetic of anti-development." As we saw in Chapter 1, Andrew Lytle transformed sallet and corn into magical anti-commodities. Similarly, Welty homes in on the magnolia flower which "can be seen for several miles on a clear day"--an archetypal symbol of a "Southern" Nature that has reestablished "for the third time, or the fourth, or the hundredth" its supremacy over human history and "commerce."<sup>23</sup>

I am arguing that there is reason to believe that the broad, vague scope of "Place in Fiction" and the "natural" focus of "River Country" allowed certain neo-Agrarian critics to celebrate Welty's "sense of place" rather than recognising that--according to the Agrarians' own proprietary ideal--"the South" no longer existed. However, the referential gap or time-space warp between Welty's textual "sense of place" and socio-spatial reality has not gone unnoticed. In 1963, Daniel approvingly referred to the town of Morgana in *The Golden Apples* (1949) as "an organism, to which its people could feel that they belonged." But with some perturbation, Daniel noted that Welty writes "in the past tense: most of the incidents in *The Golden Apples* take place in 1910 or a little later." This warp is particularly apparent in *Losing Battles* (1970). In *Requiem for the Renaissance*, Walter Sullivan pointedly observes that "the brilliant novel *Losing Battles* is a long look backward. The action is very carefully circumscribed in terms of time and place; it is set in the middle 1930s and consequently none of the agonies of our own situation in history are allowed to intrude." Sullivan's polemical point is that the best contemporary Southern literature (in 1972, he had made similar remarks



regarding Walker Percy and the “neo-Agrarian” Madison Jones) does not remotely refer to the present.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, Sullivan’s own neo-Agrarian nostalgia is evident. Speaking alongside Sullivan in 1972, historian Norman Brown perceptively identified a certain ideological bias informing literary critics’ celebration of *Losing Battles* as “the last good ‘southern novel.’” Brown observed that such rhetoric revealed the extent to which critics “think of the southern novel as being rooted in the agrarian order.” To take Brown’s point further, I want to suggest that Sullivan and other critics could see *Losing Battles* as the great latecomer of “Southern literature” because Welty so vividly portrays subsistence farming in a Mississippi hill-country hamlet. One might term it a return of the critically repressed: of sense of place as the Agrarians’ proprietary ideal.<sup>25</sup>

In contrast to Jefferson or even Frenchman’s Bend, Banner barely has been touched by the cash nexus, let alone a bank—Sullivan’s central symbol of property “tend[ing] towards abstraction” under finance capitalism. To be sure, there are occasional, oblique signs that Banner has experienced socio-economic change. For example, Curly Stovall has taken possession of the village store. However, for all his meanness, Stovall is no Flem Snopes. An ongoing source of comedy in *Losing Battles* is the Renfro family’s inability or refusal to reimburse “that billy goat [in] cash” for goods he begrudgingly gives them on credit. On a somewhat larger scale, a lumber company has been and gone again, destroying the woods in the process. We learn that the mill-owner Dearman “took over some of the country, brought niggers in here, cut down every tree within forty miles, and run it through a sawmill.” Yet even Dearman is dismissed by the Renfros as merely a “glorified Stovall.” Nor has the mill’s withdrawal had any discernible impact upon a local

labour market largely engaged in subsistence farming. Finally, there are disturbing hints that the Renfro farm itself is failing. Reference is made to the family's current reliance upon New Deal food programs for basic sustenance. Uncle Dolphus declares defiantly that "[f]armers still and evermore will be!" but, as we saw in Chapter 1, the Depression (and the New Deal itself) was the death-knell of small farming as a widespread, typically Southern way of life. Yet the gloomy prospects of the Renfro clan barely impinge upon the polyvocal carnival conducted at Granny Vaughn's birthday reunion. A critic such as Sullivan could see *Losing Battles* as a successful "Southern novel" because (like *The Hamlet*) it demonstrates familial love redeeming an agrarian community that, almost incidentally, still resists finance capitalism--something that the (post-) South of the 1970s had conspicuously failed to do.<sup>26</sup>

If Sullivan's agonised awareness of the South's socio-economic destruction motivates his celebration of novels that retain a residual sense of the region as agrarian, he never loses sight of the anachronistic nature of Welty's (or Madison Jones') fiction. Nonetheless, there remains a related problem. Sullivan's Tate-ian eschatological paradigm makes it all but impossible to talk about that recent literature that *has* depicted the region's post-agrarian (or post-Agrarian) socio-spatial reality. The same criticism can be made of Young, not to mention Tate himself. Young's adoption of Tate's Southern decline (and death) narrative includes the immediate assumption that modern Southern fiction has no real sense of place. As Young states explicitly, "it is difficult to differentiate between the contemporary southern novel and the fiction produced in New York, Chicago or Paris." If Rubin's neo-Agrarian "image" of "the South" seems to be floating without reference to any contemporary socio-spatial reality, the "remarkably

gloomy” worldview of Sullivan and Young’s criticism is no more helpful to a nuanced understanding of contemporary “Southern literature.”<sup>27</sup>

In what follows, I hope to demonstrate that, pace Tate, studying post-Renaissance “Southern literature” (or pace Sullivan, post-*Losing Battles* “Southern literature”) is not an “academic” or redundant matter, about to be buried by this latest dissertation.<sup>28</sup> It may no longer be primarily agrarian--it may in fact have ceased to exist as a distinctive economic-geographical entity--but the social practice and production of place goes on in that region we have known as “the South.” Indeed, whether one likes it or not, capitalist land speculation and real estate development play a major role in the reproduction--the creative destruction--of traditional Southern loci. How, then, can we theorise such socio-spatial processes in literary-critical terms? Given the extent to which they have been burdened with, constructed upon, Agrarian and neo-Agrarian beliefs, we may want to begin by reconfiguring the foundational terms: “South,” “Southern literature” and “sense of place.”

## II

### *Postsouthern Cartographies*

In 1980, Lewis P. Simpson published an essay entitled “The Closure of History in a Postsouthern America.” Simpson coined the term “postsouthern” to denote the emergence of a new literary moment in which “[t]he history of the literary mind of the South seeking to become aware of itself”--a central aspect of Southern Renaissance writing--no longer appeared to operate. As such, Simpson suggests, “[t]he epiphany of the southern literary artist will not be repeated. The Southern Renaissance will not come again.” Simpson concludes on a slightly more

optimistic note than Sullivan, positing that “the postsouthern America” presented by Walker Percy might yet yield “a return to a participation in the mystery of history.”<sup>29</sup>

Though Simpson’s initial definition was tentative, the neologism introduced into Southern literary and cultural criticism an imperative to reassess the legitimacy of other established tropes, beliefs and constructs. As Michael Kreyling suggests, “postsouthern” has been “an enabling word”—similar to and synonymous with “postmodern”—with which to reassess the meaning and legitimacy of such foundational terms as “South” and “Southern.” Of those other scholars who offered early definitions of “Post-Southernism,” Stephen Flinn Young most specifically related it to the “sense of place.” Young begins by pondering whether “we may have even become prisoners of our own fascination” with sense of place, “for when change overtakes us and place, even the place we call the South, is not the place it used to be, anxiety strikes.” Yet Young ultimately seeks a postsouthern art that retains the “pre-postmodern [...] sense of place.” He finds it in contemporary sculpture that, for all its formal innovation, focuses its representative attention upon rather familiar rural figures and landscapes. To paraphrase Kreyling, Young ends up folding the new (Simpson’s postsouthern America) into the established (a rural Southern sense of place).<sup>30</sup>

It is Kreyling who has most incisively extended Simpson’s enabling word as a critical tool with which to explicate recent fiction. Kreyling’s version of the postsouthern is tied to postmodernist parody: a literary technique that, in the (post)southern context, liberates contemporary authors like Barry Hannah, Harry Crews and Reynolds Price from a Faulknerian anxiety of influence (usually imposed upon them by literary critics). Scott Romine has pertinently noted that

such a theory of postsouthernism does not refer to any “real South,” i.e., to a contemporary, material geography. As Romine remarks, “[b]ecause parody takes as its primary object not a thing but a style or system of representations,” the postsouthern text can only parody “previous imitations of place.” I believe that there is cause for concern here. One wonders whether postsouthern literature will *ever* refer to, let alone try to represent, the “real South” (which, as Romine notes, is “a concept [Kreyling] does not reject entirely”). More pointedly, one might ask if literary postsouthernism, in all its ingenious intertextuality, refers to the real, highly capitalist geography of the *post*-South--in Gavin Wright’s words, the “new economy that has moved into the geographic space formerly occupied by the older [rural, agricultural] one.”<sup>31</sup>

At this point, it is worth discussing a 1990 essay by Julius Rowan Raper. While Raper does not discuss the postsouthern per se, he offers a properly sceptical “postmodern view” as to why “the extraordinary sense of place [...] is a mainstay still of Modern Southern Fiction--but, less and less, of modern Southern life.” Raper argues that, as contemporary Southerners assert a more stable sense of *self*, rather than relying on a sense of *place*, so a postmodern Southern literature will emerge. Liberated from “fidelity to description of place,” this postmodern Southern literature will have “a special role to play in keeping us *free* from the verisimilitude, the seeming truth, that ‘controllers of reality,’ the advertisers and ideologues of the age, have a distinct interest in foisting upon us.” As Romine observes, Raper’s “postmodern view” is “an anti-mimetic style that will not emerge *from* place, but *against* it in the form of postmodern subversions of verisimilitude.” Yet again, one must ask whether this “playful [...] liberating” literature will even attempt to depict the socio-spatial reality of the post-South.

Raper himself notes that “the skylines of Atlanta, even Durham, show us that we are becoming the Postmodern South.” But by turning to “the kingdom of imagination” and away from “the sociological and historical literature of memory,” will Raper’s postmodern Southern literature also turn away from the capitalist reality of Atlanta’s sense of place(lessness)?<sup>32</sup>

The most sophisticated piece of work on the postsouthern sense of place is Romine’s essay “Where is Southern Literature?: The Practice of Place in a Postsouthern Age” (2000). Romine asks whether the terms “southern” and “place” can endure “without mimetic reference at the economic or ideological levels.” I have already argued that, even in the 1940s, the “overdeveloped eschatological sense” of place patented by Allen Tate and perpetuated by subsequent critics strongly implied that “the South” *could not* survive capitalist redevelopment of agricultural real property. On these terms, it would seem that “southern” and “place” can no longer claim “mimetic reference” at the economic level--i.e., at a traditional, agricultural base. Romine himself vacillates as to whether “Tate’s eschatology was correct, only premature; it may be premature yet.” However, he also asserts that “it seems inevitable that the erosion of economic and ideological distinctiveness will radically alter the meaning of place.” Echoing Raper, Romine states that “[a]lmost certainly, place as a marker of southern literary identity cannot continue under the aegis of verisimilitude and mimesis.” In the final paragraph, he tentatively predicts that “southern literature will become less real,” with *hyper*realists like Hannah and Lewis Nordan “generat[ing] their own worlds without especially borrowing from ours.” As his concern over Kreyling’s theory of postsouthern parody suggests, Romine is sceptical about a postsouthern practice of place that exists only in “purely textual

form.” However, his concluding, Baudrillardian intimation that postsouthern fiction “might, in fact, dispense with reality altogether” leaves us in the same quandary as the theories of Kreyling and Raper. We face the prospect of a literary (and literary-critical) refusal to refer to, let alone represent, the social reality of “place(lessness)” in a late capitalist post-South.<sup>33</sup>

I want to suggest that a historical-geographical materialist approach might help us to recover the relation between postsouthern literature and the socio-spatial reality of the contemporary (post-) South. It might even enable us to retrieve and update that aspect of the Agrarians’ (and Sullivan’s) work that has been largely ignored: their critique of (finance) capitalism and its role in the production and destruction of place. Romine provocatively juxtaposes Tate’s theory of “provincialism” to Jean-François Lyotard’s claim that “capitalism inherently possesses the power to derealize familiar objects, social roles, and institutions to such a degree that the so-called realistic representations can no longer evoke reality except as nostalgia or mockery.”<sup>34</sup> Romine thus implies that the postsouthern rejection of “the real South” relates to the kind of derealisation of place by capitalism that, in different periods, both Tate and Lyotard observed. Yet one might ask--of Kreyling, Raper and Romine--whether a (post)southern literary (-critical) turn away from socio-spatial reality into non-referential narrative play merely mimics (and not parodically) capitalist reification. To put it another way: if postmodern capitalism--particularly that form of finance capitalism once identified by Tate--has derealised or abstracted familiar Southern geographies, one might ask whether postsouthern hyperrealism risks uncritically recapitulating the (il)logic of late capitalism itself. Is there a danger that the parodic poetics of postsouthernism are neutered, even co-opted, by a socio-economic system that

has derealised the foundational sense of place more than hyperreal fiction ever could?

This is where historical-geographical materialism comes in. Given capitalism's tremendous impact upon the material production of place in our time, it becomes all the more important to consider texts that *do* try to represent the socio-spatial reality of the post-South. Postsouthern literature should not be hermetically sealed in some hyperreal hall of self-reflexive non-representations. This does not mean that one must recourse to some outdated (nostalgic, according to Lyotard) notion of mimetic "realism"--or even literature per se--as retaining some residual "truth-value" that, more than "any other signifying practice," resists and critiques capitalism. Postmodern literary theorists like Linda Hutcheon have taught us that fiction "actually refer[s] at the first level to other texts: we know the past (which really did exist) only through its textualised remains." Indeed, postsouthern parody is valuable precisely because it emphasises the extent to which the *Southern* past--and Southern place--have been defined primarily through its literary mediations or "images," rather than socio-historical or socio-spatial reality. So I do not want to dismiss the power of postsouthern, intertextual parody. But I *do* want to insist that we must pay attention to the historical-geographical, material reproduction of place as real estate, and the creation, destruction and mediation of place by capitalism itself.<sup>35</sup>

As it happens, even as "place" has remained a received idea in Southern literary criticism--the recent efforts of Raper and Romine notwithstanding--the concept has come under intensive scrutiny in postmodern theory spanning various academic disciplines. In *Postmodern Geographies* (1989), Edward Soja called for (and himself enacted) "the reassertion of space in critical social theory." From



a spatial turn first taken by Henri Lefebvre and, more tentatively, Michel Foucault, much theoretical attention is now being paid to place. Soja regards postmodern geographies as the result of “successive eras of capitalist development” and calls for “a simultaneously historical and geographical materialism” that will allow us to fully comprehend these social processes. He posits that “the development of what I call postmodern geographies has progressed far enough to have changed significantly both the material landscape of the contemporary world and the interpretative terrain of critical theory.” I hope that my own historical-geographical materialist approach to the capitalist production of place in the (post-) South will contribute to a new interpretative terrain through which we can understand postsouthern geographies--and postsouthern literary cartographies. First, though, I want to conclude this chapter, and Part 1, with a brief assessment of some of the theoretical approaches to postmodern capitalist geographies that I will be incorporating into Parts 2 and 3.<sup>36</sup>

In *Inventing Southern Literature*, Kreyling quotes the leading left-wing theorist of the postmodern: “Fredric Jameson might say that ‘southern’ has fallen victim to the inexorable critical-economic process of commodification: ‘Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process [commodification] is complete and nature is gone for good.’” I do not fully understand what Kreyling wants Jameson to mean here. I take it that Kreyling quotes Jameson to iterate that foundational terms such as “southern” have been--to use Agrarian rubric in a suitably postsouthern, parodic fashion--“uprooted” by commodity fetishism to the extent that nothing seems “natural” any more. If so, this is a rather reductive take on Jameson’s theory of postmodernism as “the cultural logic of late

capitalism.” For Jameson, it is not simply the authority of semiotic referents that has been undermined by commodification. Capitalism’s awesome power has resulted in no less than the material “effacement of Nature [itself], and its precapitalist agricultures, from the postmodern.” Indeed, one rather doubts whether Jameson would agree with Kreyling’s suggestion that “capitalism” cannot (any more than “southern”) operate as a “totalizing and totally authoritative referent.” For Jameson, late capitalism’s hegemonic, even total expansion into previously residual or resistant loci (including Natural and agricultural spaces) is a defining feature of postmodernity.<sup>37</sup>

Jameson pays no particular attention to the South *per se*. However, his passing reference to Faulkner “inherit[ing] a social and historical raw material, a popular memory” that “inscribed the coexistence of modes of production in narrative form” eerily echoes Tate’s theory that Renaissance writers’ historical consciousness enabled them to record the shift between, and the juxtaposition of, precapitalist agriculture and the abstract property relations of finance capitalism. If, as Jameson suggests, precapitalist agricultures have now been entirely effaced, what has become of “place” in Faulkner’s or the Agrarians’ “South”? At the national level, Jameson observes that “in that simpler phenomenological or regional sense, place in the United States no longer exists, or, more precisely, it exists at a much feeblar level, surcharged by [...] the increasingly abstract [...] power network of so-called multinational capitalism itself.” One can imagine Tate grimly concurring with this assessment of a *postsouthern* America. Davidson, Ransom, Lytle and Warren, too, might have agreed that, under contemporary finance capitalism, “older kinds of existential positioning of ourselves [...] in the natural landscape, the individual in the older village or organic community

[become] exceedingly problematical." One might conclude that, where Tate had earlier insinuated and anticipated, so Jameson would assert that "the South"--not only the textual sign, but also the material or imaginary place of precapitalist agricultures to which the Agrarians and Faulkner once referred--has indeed been destroyed by capitalism.<sup>38</sup>

The geographer David Harvey provides another important historical-geographical materialist approach to postmodern capitalist place production. In *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), Harvey gives a name to the acceleration and expansion of capitalism since 1973 that Jameson also describes: "time-space compression." In another echo of the Agrarians, Harvey too notes the increasingly "abstract," "de-materialized" nature of finance capitalism, even the money form itself, as "currency markets fluctuate across the world's spaces," apparently detached from "productive activity within a particular space." Harvey also emphasises a more material phenomenon that he calls the "spatial fix," whereby excess capital and labour are re-routed into "the production of new spaces within which capitalist production can proceed." Harvey mentions the South as one such "geographical centre of accumulation."<sup>39</sup>

In *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996), Harvey provides a couple of examples that suggest the paradoxes of abstract and material place relations in the contemporary South. Harvey quotes German theatre director Johannes Birringer's response to the "unforeseen collapse of space" in two Texan cities, Dallas and Houston. Birringer remarks upon "the unavoidable fusion and confusion of geographical realities, or the interchangeability of all places, or the disappearance of visible (static) points of reference into a constant commutation of surface images." Birringer could be describing the spatial confusion of

postsouthern capitalist cities that are built not only upon *local* oil production, but also bound up in *global* capitalist trade. Yet Harvey's other example stands as a sobering contrast. In Hamlet, North Carolina, in 1991, a chicken-processing plant run by the Imperial Foods corporation caught fire, killing 25 workers. The chicken-processing industry has been dubbed "the latest industry of toil to reign in the South," reminding us that, even today, there exists economic exploitation that bears bleak comparison with what has gone before in the region.<sup>40</sup>

The above examples aside, Harvey, like Jameson, gives little direct attention to the (post-) South. Yet I would also repeat the speculative point that--in the tradition of "similarity between Agrarian and Marxist critiques of capitalism"--Tate, Ransom and Lytle, together with the neo-Agrarian likes of Sullivan and Young, would likely concur with much of these contemporary, left-wing critiques.<sup>41</sup> Soja, Jameson and Harvey provide a critical framework through which to approach a post-Agrarian social geography in which agricultural real property has been comprehensively displaced by what Tate termed the abstract property relations of finance capitalism. The critical difference is that, unlike the Agrarians and many of their neo-Agrarian literary critical followers, these contemporary theorists try to understand how people live in a world in which the usual platitudes of "place"--whether as pre-capitalist proprietary ideal, or literary-critical "image"--no longer hold. A Jamesonian critique might attack the Agrarians as part of that "right-wing critique of capitalism" which portrays "a 'fall' into civilization"--a fall out of place into a nostalgic yearning for (to paraphrase Faulkner) a make-believe region which perhaps never existed anywhere anyway.<sup>42</sup> We have seen how Tate's literary critical vision of the South operated as an eschatological decline narrative that, by Walter Sullivan's time, had become a

requiem for the renaissance. The challenge, then, is to apply the theories of Jameson, Harvey, Soja and others in a manner that might take us beyond the defunct Agrarian/neo-Agrarian "South," and into the contemporary post-South in which people still live--and authors still write.

As we have seen, Harvey continues to refer to "the US South." However, many other commentators, not to mention boosters, have preferred the term "Sunbelt" to describe the regional boom since the 1970s. As a semiotic sign referring to the radical economic redevelopment of the region previously known as "the South," "Sunbelt" might be seen as a specifically capitalist synonym for "*postsouthern*." However, I would argue that *postsouthern* is a more useful *critical* term because, unlike "Sunbelt," the word (specifically, the prefix) does not simply erase the historical-geographical continuities of uneven development (of which the chicken-processing industry is an example). Too often, "Sunbelt" has been a highly performative sign, barely referring to, or at best obfuscating, the socio-spatial inequality that remains. If I generally want "postsouthern" to signify a radical *break* with our familiar ideas of "the South," the etymological retention of "southern" can also point up historical-geographical continuities--much as Harvey and Soja emphasise that *postmodern* geographies arise out of capitalist modernity and "successive eras of capitalist development."

Jameson insists that one can counter postmodern capitalist abstraction through "the practical reconquest of a sense of place" (and not only within a local geography, but also "the global system"). Soja articulates a similar sensibility, a "spatialised ontology," whereby individuals and groups undertake "an ontological struggle to restore the meaningful existential spatiality of being" *within* postmodern capitalist geographies. Meanwhile, Harvey emphasises that:

Concern for both the real and fictional qualities of place increases in a phase of capitalist development in which the power to command space, particularly with respect to financial and money flows, has become more marked than ever before [...] The preservation or construction of a sense of place is then an active moment in the passage from memory to hope, from past to future.<sup>43</sup>

If “the South” no longer survives as a material, socio-spatial reality, or even as part of the Agrarian political-poetical imagination, this does not mean that postsouthern geographies exhibit no sense of place. Nor does it mean that the practice of everyday life is futile. The books that I discuss in subsequent chapters are variously set in suburban New Orleans circa 1960; Mississippi in the 1970s and 1980s; Atlanta in the 1980s and 1990s; and even pre-millennial New Jersey. In various ways and to varying degrees, Walker Percy, Richard Ford, Anne Rivers Siddons, Tom Wolfe and Toni Cade Bambara all construct postsouthern cartographies in which suburban and urban land speculation and development is commonplace. “Sense of place” may well have been substituted by “cents of place.”<sup>44</sup> Yet at important points in most of these novels, we witness characters undertaking the active, hopeful and contingent reconstruction of a spatialised ontology, a reconstructed sense of place, that allows them to live within their respective postsouthern worlds. It is precisely because the familiar Southern “sense of place” is defunct that “the scholarly imagination” should be engaged with the “real and fictional qualities of place” manifested in postsouthern life and literature.

**Part Two**

**The Postsouthern Turn:**

**Warren, Percy, Ford**

**and the Redevelopment of Place**

## CHAPTER THREE

### Toward a Postsouthern Sense of Place: Robert Penn Warren's *A Place to Come to* and Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*

When Lewis Simpson introduced the term “postsouthern” to the literary critical lexicon, he had in mind the work of Walker Percy. Chiefly concerned with the fate of the “literary mind of the South” in the post-Renaissance period, Simpson focused upon the desperate struggle of “the southern consciousness” depicted in Percy’s *The Last Gentleman* (1966). However, in positing that “Walker Percy suggest[s] we are beginning to live in a postsouthern America,” Simpson identified Percy’s concern with the transformation not only of the South’s literary mind, but also its social space. Perhaps more eloquently and explicitly than any other post-Renaissance writer, Percy observed the perniciously lingering, purely literary influence of such foundational, canonical “Southern” spaces as “Faulkner country” and “O’Connor country.” It was Percy who implored that the contemporary “Southern” writer should “not try to become a neo-Agrarian.”<sup>1</sup>

In the main, this chapter explicates Percy’s debut novel, *The Moviegoer* (1961), in terms of its significance, and its limits, as a proto-postsouthern literary representation of a changing social geography. However, I want to begin with a brief reading of “place” in a novel by one of the original Agrarians: Robert Penn Warren’s *A Place to Come to* (1977). I argue that Warren’s last novel enacts its own postsouthern turn. The one-time contributor to *I’ll Take My Stand* and *Who Owns America?* offers an obliquely parodic interrogation of “the South,” “Southern



literature” and “sense of place”--albeit complexly commingled with a residual antipathy towards the capitalist reproduction of “the South.”

Most importantly for my purposes, the sense of place presented by Warren’s character narrator, Jediah (“Jed”) Tewksbury, affords a useful comparison to that exhibited by Percy’s character-narrator, John Bickerson (“Binx”) Bolling. This sense of place is manifested as Jed and Binx experience and narrate not only the capitalist reproduction of familiar “Southern” sites, but also the built spaces of “the North”--particularly Chicago and the small-town Midwest. There are two significant “Southern” sequences in Warren’s novel--Jed’s youth in rural, small-town Alabama in the 1930s, and his young adult, academic life in Nashville in the early 1950s. As we will see, even in the 1950s (as narrated from the 1970s), Jed develops a sceptical, ironical attitude towards implicitly Agrarian conceptions of “the South” as agricultural real property. By contrast, Binx initially seems content with his everyday life in the burgeoning suburbs of New Orleans circa 1960. However, Binx gradually evinces a deeply troubled relationship to the capitalist development of postsouthern geographies. I argue that this anxiety arises not least because Binx himself is involved in the material reproduction of, and financial speculation in, familiar “Southern” places: urban New Orleans and rural bayou country. Ultimately, I hope to show how, in order to redeem some residual, authentic “South” from (sub)urban real estate development, Binx invokes the kind of purely rhetorical contrasts between “North” and “South” that no longer serve for Warren’s postsouthern philosopher of “place(lessness),” Jed Tewksbury.

## I

*"A Charade of the Past": Agrarian Place and Postsouthern Parody in A Place to Come* to

*A Place to Come* to begins with the narrator, Jed Tewkesbury, recounting the outlandish death of his father, Buck, back when Jed himself was a young boy still living on the family farm in the Heaven's Hope neighbourhood of Dugton, Alabama, during the early 1930s. Almost immediately, though, Jed acknowledges that such a scene "does not seem real. It is like something I might have read in one of those novels about the South, if I had been old enough back then in the time they were being written."<sup>2</sup> In archetypal postmodern fashion, literary representations have come to precede the "real." To cite Linda Hutcheon, Jed realises that "the past (which really did exist)" can only be known "through its textualized remains." Yet I would suggest that Jed--or rather, Warren--is making more than a fashionable literary-technical point, or a general observation about the fate of "Southern literature." More specifically, Warren is signalling that the 1930s rural South of Jed's youth, and of his own Agrarian years, no longer carries that "concrete" sense of place as agricultural real property upon which the Agrarians grounded their proprietary ideal.<sup>3</sup>

In 1930, in "The Hind Tit," Andrew Lytle could construct his textual aesthetic of anti-development with the conviction that it referred to a rural, social reality. For Warren in 1977, prospective signifiers of "Southernness"--place-based anti-commodities in the Agrarian grain of Lytle's magical corn and sallet--have not simply lost their aura: they have become actually and textually extinct. Warren does not quite make Michael Kreyling's postsouthern move of "put[ting] quotation marks around the real." However, Jed is at pains to explain that "buttermilk was hung in the well--a method used in that time and place to keep

milk cool" (12). He has to clarify that "trading" was "the old rural word," and that the liquor his father imbibed with alarming frequency "they called white mule" (14). More generally, Jed acknowledges dryly that not only the "citizens of the Heaven's Hope neighborhood, Claxford County, Alabama," but also those citizens' small farms, "were really alive then and [are] really dead by now." Reporting that the agrarian "real" (or Agrarians' ideal) has been effaced, Jed is also required to *explain* this dead reality to us, his latecomer readers. In the process, Jed's narrative becomes less a mimetic representation than a rhetorical mediation of a past that, "in God's truth," really did exist (10).<sup>4</sup>

Doggedly trying to demonstrate that Dugton folk were not simply "characters in a piece of [grotesque Southern] fiction," Jed invokes a distinctly Agrarian binary opposition between rural, Southern concrete experience and Northern, urban finance capitalist abstraction:

sustained by hope and irony but in a few years to enter a time of long hunger and despair as the consequence of something that was to happen in New York City, which they had vaguely heard about, in the Stock Market, which was something they had never before heard about or, if they had, thought was a place where people bought and sold cattle and work stock.  
(10)

Here, Jed explicitly attributes the Depression-era destruction of the Southern small farmer to a Northern or national market economy. However, Jed's narrative is not one of simple neo-Agrarian nostalgia for a "real" South of subsistence farms. He recounts how, after Buck's death, his mother sold the (already diminished) family farm, moved into town, and took a job "in the new canning factory." Though this was "the only industrial development that, even by the bait

of no taxes and no unions, ever got lured to Dugton before World War II" (17), it signals the socio-spatial shifts in the rural South of the 1930s. More importantly, the main reason that Jed's mother works so hard is to relocate him "to a real city a thousand miles from this-here Dugton" (323). As she tells him regularly during his youth, there "[a]in't nothing here for you [...] Yores is waiting for you, somewheres" (32). Given this background, it is unsurprising that Jed's own relation to Alabama, and to "the South," is experientially limited--he leaves Dugton in 1935, and is in Chicago before 1940--and philosophically sceptical.<sup>5</sup>

The other Southern site featured substantially in *A Place to Come to* is Nashville, where the young Jed gets a position as a university lecturer in the early 1950s. Before Jed's departure from the University of Chicago, his self-appointed mentor smugly assumes that, "like Antaeus," Jed needs to "go back to your native earth" (117)--even though Alabama-born Jed "had never even seen the place [Nashville] before, had never harbored even a fleeting twinge of curiosity about it." Jed identifies Dr. Sweetzer as an "innocent Indiana victim of Thomas Nelson Page and *Gone with the Wind* and the Lost Cause" (118). Here, Jed is clearly satirising Northerners' textually mediated (distorted) conception of a monolithic "South." It is all the more notable, then, that the Nashville sequence itself is characterised by a subtle postsouthern scepticism toward certain other intertexts closer to Warren's own experience: the Agrarian writings of the 1930s.

Jed describes Nashville as "a thriving middle-size commercial city of the Buttermilk Belt" (123). In doing so, he immediately distinguishes Nashville from Dr. Sweetzer's "South" of Tara and Ole Virginia. But Jed also indicates a referential divide between the modern, urban capitalist city where the Nashville Agrarians were based, and the rural, agricultural loci that they celebrated in their

texts. To be sure, Jed becomes friendly with a Nashville farmer, Bill Cudworth. However, for all that his very surname seems a magical signifier of agrarian values, Cudworth is certainly not the subsistence farmer valorised in *Who Owns America?* Though Bill now lives in the very farmhouse that was also his birthplace, he was most recently a lawyer in New York City. Bill's coming home again has been negotiated through the "Northern" cash nexus: he has bought the old farm back with money he made in New York. Moreover, Bill has hired tenants to help take care of daily duties. Jed is torn between admiration for the ostensibly "simple completeness of their [the Cudworths'] life," and "ask[ing] myself what their world meant: a charade of the past" (146). Jed is perceptive enough to ask whether, in Baudrillardian terms, the Cudworths' farm is only a simulated "image" that "masks the *absence* of a basic reality"--authentic (subsistence) farming. Indeed, even Bill himself is self-consciously concerned that perhaps "nothing I'm doing is even real" (174).<sup>6</sup>

The apogee of *A Place to Come to*'s postsouthern scepticism toward the Agrarian conception of place as agricultural real property comes when Bill tells Jed that "there's a really nice farm coming up for sale right here, overlapping me on a corner. Right price, any terms desired. Part of an estate being wound up. You're a Southerner, why not come home like me, settle down? [...] Mix farming and professoring" (175). Bill implies that being a Southerner is essentially, existentially related to farming. However, Bill elides not only his earlier doubts over his own role as a part-time, even performative farmer, but also the precipitous post-Wall Street Crash decline in Southern agriculture. As we saw in Chapter 1, this decline destroyed the Agrarian claim that farming was (or could be again) the basis of a distinctive "Southern" identity. What is more, the Cudworths

and their ilk seem to be supplanting the last of the genuine farmers. Bill seems unconcerned about the fate of the tenant who runs the bankrupt farm that he implores Jed to buy on the cheap. Relating how the tenant “had a farm once, his own [...] Not much of a place, but something. He lost it” (178), Bill attributes the man’s fate to alcoholism. Bill never considers a reversal of cause and effect: that the loss of his own farm (hardly unusual in the 1930s and 1940s--see Chapter 2), followed by a slide into servile tenancy, might have led the farmer to drink. It is Jed who, while assessing the property, becomes disturbed by the presence of “the tenant of the farm,” the haunted eyes of whom, “bloodshot and defeated, glare in outrage at me” (177). Whatever the exact reasons for the tenant’s gloomy situation, the presence of this lifelong farmer throws Jed’s own half-hearted plans to play “Southern” into sharp relief, and he does not buy the farm.

*A Place to Come to*’s Nashville farm owners (rather than farmers per se) are those who can afford it--the former New York lawyer Bill Cudworth, the artist-socialite Lawford Carrington. To varying degrees, they use their farms to perform “Southernness.” The Cudworths’ and Carringtons’ existing wealth allows them to combine farming and socialising, without worrying about the grim economic reality of agriculture itself. Only Jed really sees through this “charade of the past.” In the process, he personally rejects the opportunity to “mix farming and professoring”--once felt by the Agrarians as something of an obligation, but which to Jed seems just as self-conscious as mixing farming and partying. Ultimately, Jed’s life in Nashville narrows into the “timeless sexuality” of his relationship with Rozelle Carrington. For Jed, the abolition of time and space through sex at least means that “I did not ever have to play with the pretense or

the self-delusion of joining Nashville, or any other goddamned place, [or] of being Southern” (209).<sup>7</sup>

However, both before and after 1951, Jed Tewksbury moves in a social world that extends far beyond Nashville: a social world that, following Simpson, we might call postsouthern America. When Jed studies and later teaches in Chicago, Warren disrupts familiar Agrarian oppositions between the rural South and the Northern (or Midwestern) metropolis. Late in the novel, Jed states that “I knew Chicago better than any place in the world, and I suppose I loved it” (318). But the most notable example of Jed embracing the North is his relationship with Ripley City, South Dakota, the place where his first wife, Agnes, came from. During his first visit to Ripley, Jed initially expresses a reflexively “Southern” view that the Midwestern geography, including the big sky, is the objective correlative of “a new kind of loneliness.” Jed remarks of Ripley’s sky- and landscape that “the distance is fleeing away from you, bleeding away from you, in all directions, and if you can’t stop the process you’ll be nothing left except a dry, transparent husk” (93). Yet by the end of that first visit, Jed admits that, “though I had approached Ripley City with dire misgivings, I now looked back on my stay with elegiac pleasure.” He realises that Ripley is “[n]ot isolated. Not lost”; rather, it is “perfectly self-contained, self-fulfilling, complete.” If Ripley is not the aggregate of subsistence farms evoked by the Agrarians’ proprietary ideal—the railroad that takes wheat away provides “fine filaments of connection with the outside world” (95)—then it contrasts very favourably with Dugton or Nashville. Indeed, Ripley, not Dugton, is the “place to come to” of the novel’s title. When Agnes dies and is buried in Ripley, her priest father promises the widower that “a place will always

be kept waiting by her side.” Despite sardonically noting the differences between Dugton and Ripley--thus invoking a “Southern” sense of homeplace that he does not actually live out--Jed acknowledges that “it was nice to know that there was, somewhere, a place to come to” (114). As it transpires, Jed repeatedly returns to Ripley before he ever goes down home to Dugton.

This eventual return to Dugton, after twenty-five years’ absence and a few months after his mother’s death, takes up the novel’s final pages. However, there is no sense that Jed’s return to his Southern, rural hometown provides closure--either to the narrative, or to his life. All the while Jed’s mother kept “a place for him in my heart” (391), she never wanted him to return to Dugton itself. Now that he has returned, Dugton stands as conclusive, totemic testimony to the death of the old agrarian South (or the Agrarians’ “South”). Jed cannot help but notice that “there was already a real development started” (397). Indeed, he discovers that the site of his father’s ignominious, notorious death has been “drained for the new development and the untarnished mortgages” (400). Along with Dugton’s old social geography, so too the people “were long since gone, or had transmogrified themselves into another kind of people” (397).

This late scene in Warren’s last novel fleshes out the author’s observation, in an interview with Louis Rubin from the same period, that capitalist land speculation was now so intense and ubiquitous that the South had acquired a new moniker. As Warren put it, “this term ‘Sun Belt’ is a realtor’s term, and that captures the whole story.” Nevertheless, in *A Place to Come to*, Warren works *through* the fulfilment of the old Agrarian fear that “place,” even “the South” itself, would be abstracted, displaced, by finance capitalist land speculation and development. By this, I mean that Warren goes *beyond* Allen Tate’s eschatological



vision of the death of the South to map what has replaced it. Much as the Stock Market once superseded “cattle and work stock” as the central determinant of Dugton life, so now agricultural real property has been replaced by (in Donald Davidson’s words) “a mere real estate development.”<sup>8</sup>

Tjebbe Westendorp has observed that Jed’s stepfather “Perk is more ‘real’ to him than most people he has met in the arty or academic worlds of Nashville or Chicago.” One duly notes that Jed does consider living out his life, with Perk, in his mother’s old house. However, there is little evidence that Jed really will retire to Dugton. Indeed, the novel ends not in Alabama, but with Jed back in Chicago, writing a hopeful letter of reconciliation to his second wife. It is possible that Jed’s embrace of any place, even Chicago, has and will remain semi-detached because, as he tells his friend Stephan Mostoski, “hating the South, I had fled it [...] I had fled but had found nowhere to flee to” (347). It might be argued, then, that Jed never finds his “place to come to”—certainly not in Dugton, but not in Chicago or Ripley either. Mostoski’s role in the final third of the novel seems to be to express the larger philosophical theme of which Warren was so fond: in this case, the belief that Jed’s peripateticism expresses “the first pangs of modernity [...] the death of the self which has become placeless” (348). Westendorp has observed that “Jed Tewksbury’s diagnosis of cultural crisis [...] goes beyond Nashville and its environs, beyond even the South and the American continent, to take in the entire Western world.” If there is a problem here, it is that such a grand conception of modernity’s apparently all-pervasive sense of placelessness threatens to overwhelm the local, social relations of Dugton, Nashville, or anywhere else featured in the novel. On the other hand, Warren’s monumental

sense of “cultural crisis” refuses to recognise “the South” as some residual “place,” taking its stand as a last bulwark against capitalist (post)modernity.<sup>9</sup>

We have seen how, in *A Place to Come to*, the putatively “Southern” narrator cannot come home again, either to the small-farm community of his 1930s youth, or to the inauthentic farmhouses of the Agrarians’ Nashville. We have witnessed how, by juxtaposing Nashville to Chicago, small-town Alabama to small-town South Dakota, Warren interrogates the Agrarian binary oppositions between “the North” and “the South.” Moving on to *The Moviegoer*, I want to demonstrate how Binx Bolling attempts to rescue a “Southern” sense of place by reconstructing the very North/South opposition that *A Place to Come to* dismantles.

## II

### *Binx Bolling in Gentilly*

It is a critical commonplace that the narrator of *The Moviegoer*, Binx Bolling, has seceded from his Aunt Emily’s ethos of Southern stoicism.<sup>10</sup> However, I would add that by “living the most ordinary life imaginable, a life without the old longings; selling stocks and bonds and mutual funds,” Bolling not only rejects his aunt’s mythical idea of Southern history and identity.<sup>11</sup> He also begins to establish a postsouthern sense of place by relocating himself outside Emily’s social geography. Binx was raised in Emily and Jules Cutrer’s “gracious house in the Garden District” (4) of New Orleans, but, presently approaching his thirtieth birthday, he refuses his aunt’s advice to enter medical school and return to live in his ‘old garçonnière in the carriage house’ (48). Having also become disenchanted with the French Quarter, where he dwelled for another two years, Binx has lived and worked for the last four years as a stock and bond broker in “Gentilly, a

middle class suburb." As Binx observes, "one would never guess it was part of New Orleans [...] But this is what I like about it. I can't stand the old world atmosphere of the French Quarter or the genteel charm of the Garden District" (3).

By moving Binx from the more established and exclusive areas of New Orleans into a new built space that has no traditional "Southern" identity, Walker Percy initiates his subtle parody of established Southern literary images of place. Percy confronts "Southern literature" with the contemporary socio-spatial reality of suburbia. *The Moviegoer* provocatively presents its narrator as a character who--initially, at least--unashamedly embraces a postsouthern, suburban sense of place. Binx notes that his own street, Elysian Fields, "was planned to be, like its namesake, the greatest boulevard of the city" but that "something went amiss, and now it runs an undistinguished course through shopping centers and blocks of duplexes and bungalows and raised cottages." To Binx, however, "it is very spacious and airy and seems truly to stretch out like a field under the sky" (7). Thus Binx continues to compare suburbia favourably with the pseudo-aristocratic francophilia of New Orleans' older locations.

However, the emergence of this new commercial and residential space is not as accidental or natural as Binx ingenuously implies. He soon avows as much, admitting that his interest in the erection of a new school next to his apartment is "less a religious sentiment than a financial one, since I own a few shares of Alcoa [the aluminium corporation]. How smooth and well-fitted and thrifty the aluminum feels!" (8). Binx's rhapsody to commodity fetishism announces his (albeit discreet) complicity in the *capitalist* production of suburbia, and begins to explain his conspicuously positive, *postsouthern* sense of place.

Binx's own profitable involvement in the construction of suburbia is more clearly revealed when he plans to sell his patrimony to the property developer, Sartalamaccia. Believing that the land in St. Bernard Parish on which his father had a hunting lodge is a "worthless parcel of swamp" (65), Binx proposes to sell it for only eight thousand dollars. However, upon seeing the site for the first time in years, Binx realises that its value has appreciated. "A far cry from a duck club now," the patrimony is "hemmed in on one side by a housing development" (84) owned by Sartalamaccia (87). Binx's inheritance has become a prime piece of real estate.

In "Some Notes on River Country" (1944), Eudora Welty famously commented that "I have never seen [...] anything so mundane as ghosts, but I have felt many times there [Mississippi river country] a sense of place as powerful as if it were visible and walking and could touch me." Binx seems to invoke a similar, supernatural attachment to Roaring Camp (as the patrimony is named) when he observes that his secretary, Sharon Kincaid, is *not* moved by "the thronging spirit-presence of the place and the green darkness of summer come back again and the sadness of it." But Binx's postsouthern dissociation from his family's history and geography precludes any genuine affiliation with his father's land. Binx eulogises the ancestral-pastoral "spirit-presence of place" only in order to impress the resolutely unmoved Sharon. Reverting to his initial perception of the patrimony as a material commodity, he decides that Sharon "is right" (85) to be unconcerned with any metaphysical *essence* of place. When Sartalamaccia suggests that Binx should keep his land and "make the offsite improvements" while he "build[s] the houses," Binx decides to "enjoy the consolation of making money" (88) from real estate development.<sup>12</sup>

Yet by this point, *The Moviegoer* has already taken a significant turn. For Binx has experienced an epiphany that causes him to become, at certain junctures, much more critical of the redevelopment of “Southern” sites in and around New Orleans. In the very paragraph after his ode to Alcoa, he remarks that “things have suddenly changed. My peaceful existence in Gentilly has been complicated. This morning [...] there occurred to me the possibility of a search” (8). Though Binx remains absorbed in his stock market speculations (59), he also becomes increasingly troubled. Certainly, the “search” impels Binx to reassess his sense of self. However, he also begins to go beyond “vulgar” existentialism to ponder the material, socio-spatial relations of his being-in-the-world. In Edward Soja’s terms, Binx begins to construct the “spatialised ontology” necessary to comprehend postmodern capitalist geographies. This becomes apparent when he starts taking nocturnal walks around his neighbourhood. As he paces past “the bungalows and duplexes and tiny ranch houses” and on amidst “the fifty and sixty thousand dollar homes” (78-79), he agonises over the meaning of this unfamiliar new milieu: “Instead of trying to sleep I try to fathom the mystery of this suburb at dawn. Why do [...] these new houses look haunted [...] What spirit takes possession of them?” (80-81).<sup>13</sup>

Having previously celebrated his life in Gentilly, Binx has begun to be troubled by the capitalist production of postsouthern space. But crucially, Binx avoids answering his own question: “What spirit takes possession of them?” I want to argue that Binx evades the answer--and, in fact, mystifies the question itself--because he is personally implicated in the material construction of the suburbs. Despite having rejected a supernatural “spirit-presence of place” in order to treat Roaring Camp as a commodity, he now claims a “spirit” has taken

“possession” of Gentilly. This metaphysical terminology serves to obfuscate the capitalist fetishisation of place, and Binx’s own complicity in that fetishisation. Rhetorically repressing the “spirit” of capitalism--be it the abstraction of land into exchange-value or the material reproduction of space through the erection of new houses--Binx’s narrative becomes what Fredric Jameson calls “a postmodern ghost story, ordered by finance-capital spectralities.”<sup>14</sup>

By repressing this revelation that the spectre haunting and colonising Southern “place” is speculative finance capital, Binx allows himself to postpone the “search” and revert to his earlier role as a land speculator. He plans to use the capital accrued from the patrimony deal to build and operate a service station on a vacant lot at the corner of Elysian Fields and Bon Enfants. This prompts further fetishistic rapture: “It is easy to visualize the little tile cube of a building with its far flung porches, its apron of silky concrete, and revolving on high, the immaculate bivalve glowing in every inch of its pretty styrene (I have already approached the Shell distributor)” (112). By immersing himself in capitalist speculation, Binx does not only mean to neutralise his own urge to search. He also tries to convince his cousin, Kate Cutrer, that *her* existential crisis could be resolved if she joins him in a marital cum business partnership: “Did you know you can net over fifteen thousand a year on a good station?” (109).

Binx also tries to reinvigorate his “ordinary life”--which he terms the “Little Way,” as opposed to “the big search for the big happiness” (128)--by taking a tour of the Gulf Coast with Sharon. However, at Bayou des Allemands, where his mother’s family have a fishing camp, he again experiences a horrified aversion to postsouthern space. At first, Binx appears to enjoy a pastoral sense of place: “here on Bayou des Allemands everybody feels the difference [...] The splintered

boards have secret memories of winter, the long dreaming nights when no one came and the fish jumped out of the black water and not a soul in sight in the whole savannah" (131). The next morning, however, he "awake[s] in the grip of everydayness" (136). Though Bayou des Allemands has not been defiled by material redevelopment, Binx still believes this remote rural locus has been infiltrated by *something*. I want to suggest that Binx's noun "everydayness" refers to the demoralising existential *experience* of anonymous, mass-produced, (sub)urban capitalist space. According to Binx, "everydayness" has expanded from its urban origins into even the bayou: "[t]he everydayness is everywhere now, having begun in the cities and seeking out the remotest nooks and corners of the countryside, even the swamps" (137). The implication is that industrial capitalism has extended its domain beyond mass-produced urban buildings; it is also culturally expressed through, and existentially experienced as, "everydayness." Put another way, the sinister "spirit" of "everydayness" has enabled capitalism to move beyond the material production of city space into a kind of metaphysical colonisation of the country.<sup>15</sup> This theory seems nigh-on neo-Agrarian when we consider that Donald Davidson similarly described industrial capitalism's insidious, immaterial impact upon being-in-the-(rural-Southern)-world. In medical metaphors that quite eerily anticipate Percy, Davidson posited that modern man "cannot escape the infection of the cities by mere geographical remoteness. The skepticism and malaise of the industrial mind reach him anyway."<sup>16</sup>

If Binx believes that "everydayness" has infected even the obscure bayous of Louisiana, it would seem that *no* place in the South can offer sanctuary from the existential malaise that he associates, however imprecisely, with the spectre of finance-capitalist land speculation and redevelopment. How, then, can Binx

possibly resist or escape this postsouthern dystopia--not least given that he is implicated in its production? Almost immediately upon returning from the Gulf Coast, Binx is required to travel to Chicago for a business convention. I want to suggest that the excursion to Chicago enables Binx to invoke a binary opposition between "the South" and "the North" that rhetorically reaffirms urban New Orleans (rather than rural Bayou des Allemands) as an authentic "Southern" locus. This manoeuvre enables Binx to once again--and this time conclusively--repress his fear that capitalism has destroyed the foundation. "South" in the process of developing a new *postsouthern* geography.

### *Binx in Chicago and Wilmette*

Binx begins constructing Chicago as a non-Southern site by redefining the previously discredited term "spirit-presence of the place" in a less positive fashion. Claiming that "it is my fortune and misfortune to know how the spirit-presence of a strange place can enrich or rob a man but never leave him and never leave him alone" (99), Binx depicts Chicago as a spectre threatening to snatch his body, even his very Southern self. He asserts that the city has already turned his travelling companion, Kate--Emily's stepdaughter and a belle of Garden District society--into "a regular city girl not distinguishable from any other little low-browed olive-skinned big-buttied Mediterranean such as populates the streets and subways of the North" (202). He compounds this racial construction of the metropolitan "North" by remarking that Kate has been transformed into "a dark little Rachel bound home to Brooklyn on the IRT" (195). Inflating the contrast between "the South" and "the North," Binx simply ignores the differences between Chicago and New York.



Having implied the (white) South's ethnic purity, Bolling invokes another archetypal signifier of "Southernness," the Confederate dead. During his earlier visit with Sharon to the Confederate fortress of Ship Island, Binx asserted his dissociation from regional history and its memorial geography by stating "[i]t is the soul of dreariness, this 'historic site' washed by the thin brackish waters of Mississippi Sound" (129). But in Chicago, Binx cites the "stubborn back-looking ghosts" that haunted Quentin Compson as a privileged Southern means of understanding the modern, urban North:<sup>17</sup>

Nobody but a Southerner knows the wrenching rinsing sadness of the cities of the North. Knowing all about genie-souls and living in haunted places like Shiloh and the Wilderness and Vicksburg and Atlanta where the ghosts of heroes walk abroad by day and are more real than people, he knows a ghost when he sees one. (192)

Binx also introduces the elements into his North/South binary. He comments that, whereas "Lake [Pontchartrain] in New Orleans is a backwater glimmering away in a pleasant lowland [...] Lake [Michigan] is the North itself: a perilous place from which the spirit winds come pouring forth all roused up and crying out alarm" (192). In these claims to some metaphysical or meteorological difference between "the North" and "the South," there are distinct echoes of *A Place to Come to*. More specifically, one recalls Jed Tewksbury arriving in Ripley City and identifying the "new kind of loneliness" that leaves oneself as "a dry, transparent husk." However, as we have seen, Jed abandons this self-consciously "Southern" sense of self and place and comes to appreciate the "perfectly self-contained, self-fulfilling, complete" South Dakota town far more than his Alabama hometown. By contrast, Binx's negative construction of "the North"

does not even reach its highest pitch until he visits Wilmette, Illinois, the small suburban town where his Korean war colleague, Harold Graeoner, resides. As Binx puts it, Harold lives in “a place called Wilmette which turns out not to be a place at all since it has no genie” (195). Whereas Chicago at least has an (albeit “strange” and terrifying) “spirit-presence,” Binx sees suburban Wilmette as the vanishing point of the Northern void, vindicating the Southerner’s existential fear of becoming “No-one and Nowhere” (92)--like the “dry, transparent husk” originally evoked by Jed.

Thomas Daniel Young claims that Binx “suffer[s] from the ‘new provincialism’” because he “belong[s] to no specific place,” and that *The Moviegoer* “could just as well have been set in a suburb of Rochester.” This is too simplistic: Young’s view is tied to the Tate paradigm, and as such cannot get beyond the eschatological view that the South and its sense of place have been expunged by industrial- and finance-capitalism (see Chapter 2). Young’s reading fails to register how, rather than simply accepting the “essentially characterless” homogeneity of postsouthern America, Binx uses the trip to Illinois to redeem a distinctly “Southern” sense of place.<sup>18</sup> Binx simply cannot allow New Orleans to be made equivalent to Chicago. He also refuses to accept that his pre-search everyday life in Gentilly could just as well have been set in a suburb of Illinois. One notes that the explicit horror that Bolling expresses at this supernatural vacuum called “the North” far supersedes his earlier, repressed anxiety that a similarly spectral, suburbanising “spirit” of capitalism has “take[n] possession of “the South.” But it is crucial to Binx’s redemption of “the South” that he expresses his anti-Northern attitudes only in metaphysical terms. Upon arriving in Chicago, Binx bemoans his ignorance of such “local space-time stuff” as “who built the damn [railway]

station, the circumstances of the building, details of the wrangling between city officials and the railroad" (190-191). But in fact, by depicting Chicago in vague, metaphysical language, rather than analysing it as a local, materially produced place, Binx can deride "the North" without having to ponder possible *similarities* with the redeveloped, (sub)urban "South." Arguably, this is why Binx never identifies Chicago's malevolent spirit-presence of place in more explicit terms as the "spirit" of urban, industrial- and finance-capitalism. For to directly identify the spectre of finance capital in Chicago might indirectly demystify the possessive "spirit" that Binx earlier felt, but fudged, in Gentilly. Ultimately, in rhetorically reinventing "the South" by *contrasting* it with a negation named "the North," Binx can repress his earlier terror of capitalist land speculation and its cultural logic ("everydayness"). And in doing so, he once again abnegates his own responsibility for the speculative production of *postsouthern* geographies.

#### *Getting back to the Garden District*

Appropriately, Bolling's Northern exposure ends with a telephone call from Aunt Emily. Upon returning to New Orleans, Binx visits the Cutrers' Garden District home. Emily reaches the rhetorical crescendo of her Southern stoicism as she castigates Binx for taking his sick cousin to Chicago:

More than anything I wanted to pass on to you the one heritage of the men of our family, a certain quality of spirit, a gaiety, a sense of duty, a nobility worn lightly, a sweetness, a gentleness with women--the only good things the South ever had and the only things that really matter in this life [...] But how did it happen that none of this ever meant anything to you? (213)

In dramatising how Binx has “default[ed]” (209) from his inherited position among the “gentlefolk” (211), Emily elides the social reality of racial hierarchy and spatial segregation upon which her privileged “South” is constructed. She claims that, by contrast with the derelict Binx, she has at least “some slight tradition in common” with “that Negro man walking down the street” (210). However, as an African-American manual labourer--Binx calls him “the last of the chimney sweeps” (214)--Cothard has a strictly delineated “place” in Garden District society. Emily might admit him into the privileged private space of her home as a worker, but never as a social (or stoical) equal. Revealingly, it is Cothard whom she subsequently identifies as the “prize exhibit” of a declining “human race”--the epitome of the modern “common man” (212-213) she despises.

By contrast, the banished Binx is quickly welcomed back into his aunt’s aristocratic-stoical worldview--and into her local social geography. Having returned home to Gentilly after Emily’s verbal mauling, Binx has already concluded that “[m]y search has been abandoned; it is no match for my aunt, her rightness and her despair” (217) when Kate arrives and informs him that she has told Emily of their impending marriage. The nuptials effect a rapid rapprochement between Emily and Binx. Their reconciliation is symbolically and spatially expressed in Emily’s readiness to readmit Binx to her home; as Kate tells Binx, “[s]he [Emily] only hoped that you might come and see her this afternoon” (221).

Critics have argued that the “search” is in fact fulfilled as Binx makes a Kierkegaardian “leap of faith” and achieves “community with Kate” or “communion of consciousness with Lonnie,” his half-brother.<sup>1)</sup> However, such readings leap over another lacuna exposed by the “search,” and one that remains

unresolved by *The Moviegoer's* awkward closure: Binx's repressed revelation of the capitalist production of postsouthern geographies. Phillip Simmons has astutely commented that "Binx Bolling eventually finds his way out of mass culture and back into the history of his family's and society's decline."<sup>20</sup> Giving a spatial twist to Simmons' argument, I would say that Bolling finds his way out of the postsouthern suburbs and the metaphysical fog of capitalist mass-cultural "everydayness" by getting back to the Garden District. By surrendering the "search" and marrying his cousin, Binx effects a reconciliation with his aunt and re-entry to her (and his own original) "South." In the Epilogue, the reader is abruptly informed that Bolling has left his job and apartment in Gentilly in order to enter medical school (tellingly, this is in accordance with Emily's earlier wishes). Furthermore, Kate has found the newlyweds "a house near her stepmother, one of the very shotgun cottages done over by my cousin Nell Lovell" (224). Though Binx does not move back into his old *garçonnière*, he has returned to his aunt's ideological and geographical sphere of influence.

Binx's reentry to the Bolling-Cutrer family circle, and to his aunt's "South," is perhaps eased by the fact that the whole clan is more implicated in capitalist land speculation than Emily would ever care to admit. Binx and Kate's marital home is only one example of the Lovells' involvement in gentrification: Nell and Eddie are "forever buying shotgun cottages in rundown neighborhoods and fixing them up [...] and selling in a few months for a big profit" (18). Even Emily is not immune: her ledger tantalisingly lists her inherited "properties," including "sundry service stations" (one recalls Binx's own proposed deal with Shell) and even "Canadian mines" (215). Despite Emily's rhetorical distinction between "integrity" and the "market place" (28), the Bolling-Cutrer clan's profitable

involvement in the socio-spatial transformation of “the South” helps Binx to bridge the apparent gap between his own bourgeois capitalist “Little Way,” and Emily’s pseudo-aristocratic Southern Way of Life.

Ultimately, it is doubtful whether Binx’s postsouthern incredulity towards Emily’s “South” was ever radical enough for him to undertake a serious spatialised “search” between the familiar Southern and emerging postsouthern spaces in and around New Orleans. Despite Binx’s move to Gentilly, the Garden District has remained his foundational locus and sanctuary. In the end, we might usefully project back through time and place--past Wilmette and Chicago, past Bayou des Allemands, past Binx’s anxiety-ridden walks around Gentilly--to the novel’s first meeting between Binx and his aunt. Even that early on, Binx admits: “In a split second, I have forgotten everything, the years in Gentilly, even my search. As always we take up again where we left off. This is where I belong after all” (22).

At the start of *The Moviegoer*, Walker Percy sympathetically renders Binx Bolling’s revolt against the mythical “South” and wryly satirises canonical constructions of the Southern “sense of place” by relocating Binx in Gentilly. By mapping various loci from Gentilly via Roaring Camp to Bayou des Allemands, *The Moviegoer* moves us towards a postsouthern sense of place--an awareness of capitalism’s material and experiential reproduction of traditional or supposedly “natural” Southern loci. Finally, however--and despite exposing Emily’s aristocratic Southern stoicism as an anachronistic, rhetorical construct--*The Moviegoer* envisions no escape from the “spirit” of postsouthern capitalist space other than returning Binx to his aunt’s upper-class enclave. Perhaps what Simpson

once termed Percy's own "troubled experience of life as a member of the southern patriciate" impelled him to dismiss the possibility of a postsouthern sense of place or way of life *within* the mass-produced, middle-class suburbs. Whether or not we refer back to the author himself, Binx's relegitimation of New Orleans as an authentic, aristocratic "Southern" sanctuary concludes *The Moviegoer's* (anti-) climactic retreat from postsouthern literary cartography. In the next three chapters, I shall consider three novels by Richard Ford, and show how they represent a significant extension of the postsouthern literary sensibility--not least as Ford interrogates and parodies the "sense of place(lessness)" in Percy's work.<sup>21</sup>

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Neo-Faulknerism or Postsouthernism?: Labour, Parody and the Problem of Place in Richard Ford's *A Piece of My Heart*

In a 1977 review-essay entitled "Walker Percy: Not Just Whistling Dixie," Richard Ford observed pointedly that "Percy has been telling us for a long time what most of us may be just realizing: that southern regionalism as a factor in the impulse that makes us write novels [...] has had its day." At the time, Ford must have felt especially strongly about taking his stand with Percy. He had recently published *A Piece of My Heart* (1976), a debut novel in which, as Ford confided twenty years later, "I thought I was writing about the South in a way that nobody would ever recognise as being southern." "The heartbreaking thing," Ford observed, was that critics still wrote about *A Piece of My Heart* "as a piece of, if not Gothic, at least southern writing." Most notable among these critics was fellow novelist Larry McMurtry who, in *The New York Times Book Review*, scored Ford's "neo-Faulknerism" and opined that "[t]he South--dadgummit--has struck again, marring what might have been an excellent first novel."<sup>1</sup>

I want to begin this chapter by arguing that *A Piece of My Heart* can be conceived rather differently: as the opening salvo in Richard Ford's ongoing fictional *interrogation* of "the South," especially as the region has been represented or invented in "Southern literature." Pace McMurtry, Ford's debut novel operates through postsouthern parody: the self-conscious narrative performance of "Southernness" via which the text, in Michael Kreyling's words, "adjusts or



lightens the burden of southern literariness it must necessarily carry in the presence of 'Faulkner' triumphant." It is true, though, that *A Piece of My Heart's* postsouthernism is not altogether successful; Ford himself later came to feel that, for all his best intentions, his first book remained too "indebted to Faulkner [...] to Flannery O'Connor." As such, I will also ponder the limitations of postsouthernness, particularly with regard to "place," in *A Piece of My Heart*.<sup>2</sup>

## I

### *Class, Labour and "Sense of Place": Robard Hewes*

A central plank in McMurtry's critique of *A Piece of My Heart* is the claim that "the men who carry the narrative invariably discover that they are also carrying the burden of Southern history." McMurtry is apparently referring to Ford's two central protagonists, Robard Hewes and Sam Newel: four sections of the novel focus upon Robard, and three upon Newel. Yet on this basic point, McMurtry can be rebutted. Robard Hewes is not weighed down by "the burden of Southern history." Moreover, in properly historical-*geographical* terms, neither does Robard exhibit any Southern sense of place—at least, not as "sense of place" has usually been defined in Southern literature and criticism.

At the start of the novel, we learn that Robard has been living in California for eight years. He moved West after three years working in Hazen, Arkansas, for a local landowner called Rudolph. Rudolph himself arrived in Arkansas from Nebraska "and drove all over the country between Little Rock and Memphis looking for cheap land," eventually buying "eight hundred acres of swamp fifteen miles back of Hazen, land that no farmer had even thought to abandon, much less cultivate."<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, Matthew Guinn has compared this "rapacious farmer" to

Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen. However, one might ask whether Rudolph is less a "Faulknerian shade" than Ford's *parody* of Sutpen. At the most obvious level, Rudolph is no Sutpen because, to invoke Gavin Wright's distinction, the old man's capital is concentrated in real property (his "cheap land") rather than human property (slaves). But neither is the land itself some Sutpen's (Eight) Hundred, for Rudolph does not actually see it as a farm per se, let alone plantation. Rather, the "rapacious" Rudolph makes most of his money, and Robard earned his wages, from duck hunting. Like Faulkner and Percy before him, Ford is observing the post-agrarian commodification of Southern land. As we saw in Chapter 3, Percy's Binx Bolling turns his father's former duck club into a housing development. But Rudolph commercialises duck-hunting itself to extract profit from swamp land that is largely unsuitable for farming. Urban professionals--"doctors [...] from Memphis [...] fish salesmen [...] from Gulfport and Pass Christian, or the Jews from Port Arthur"--are willing to pay a "thousand dollars a head" (7) to perform this traditional "Southern" rural pastime.<sup>4</sup>

In *Go Down, Moses* (1942), Faulkner charts the destruction of what Ike McCaslin calls "the ruined woods," and of hunting as a local, communal way of life. But in "The Bear" and "Delta Autumn," Sam Fathers' life (and death) as a hunter's guide retains a residual mythic quality.<sup>5</sup> In stark contrast, Robard's life and work as a hunter's guide in Hazen is totally defined by tedious manual labour: "watching his [Rudolph's] sluice gates and sitting out winters in the little shotgun house" while waiting "for the duck hunters" (47). Indeed, this tedium is the catalyst for Robard's flight to California, "where he felt enough distance was opened between him and the shack and the fields and the whole life there that it would be too hard to go back" (8). Returning to Arkansas from California in the

novel's present (1971), Robard does go back to Hazen. However, this brief visit merely confirms that Robard has no reason to return to the South on a permanent basis. Even the material geography of Robard's personal history in Hazen has been effaced, for Rudolph has "put soybeans in there right where you [Robard] lived" (53). Rudolph himself has atrophied in a way even the postbellum Sutpen never did, having spent over eleven years sitting and "wonder[ing] about" the collapse of his romance with Edwina, the owner of Hazen's R.E. Lee hotel. Robard realises that "he was making a mistake acting like he wanted to see the old man when he didn't want to at all" (51). Having deduced that Hazen "didn't mean anything to him" (54), Robard simply leaves.

Nor does Robard feel any peculiarly Southern "sense of place" or "burden of history" upon returning to Helena, Arkansas. Kenneth Holditch has argued that "with the southerner's typical attachment to the place from which he came, Robard, despite having inured himself against dependence on people or locations, is convinced that Helena, Arkansas, because it was his birthplace [*sic*], will allow him to fulfill his quest." It is true that, by returning to Helena, Robard puts faith in "the reliance that the place *would* hold him up long enough to do what he came to do, pay him, in a sense, for having been born there" (44). (Robard is referring more generally to Arkansas here. He was not born in Helena itself, as Holditch implies, but in Cane Hill (124).) But, as Holditch himself acknowledges, this is out of character: by recouring to this "reliance" upon Helena itself, Robard feels he is reneging on "all he had schooled himself to believe" (44). Undermined by his own scepticism, Robard's "attachment to place" cannot hold.<sup>6</sup>

Examining the reasons for Robard's incredulity towards Southern "place," we might usefully ponder Holditch's passing association between *A Piece of My*

*Heart* and *The Moviegoer*. Citing Robard's belief that life is full of "beginnings" between which "there would be vacant moments when there was no breathing and no life" (8), Holditch compares this with Binx's theory "that it was difficult just to get through an ordinary Wednesday." However, Holditch makes a qualification that he does not explore: "Walker Percy's character certainly lacks the total cynicism of Robard." *Why* does Robard seem even more cynical than Binx? Holditch rightly observes that Robard's "philosophy of life" is expressed in the maxim "[o]ne minute don't learn the next one nothin" (230). But what might be the *source* of such a belief?<sup>7</sup>

I want to argue that Robard's labour drives the "total cynicism," the extreme sense of contingency, expressed in his "philosophy of life"--and in his philosophy of place. Much as he went to Hazen for work, Robard only ever boarded in Helena (with his mother's cousin) because it was a convenient short-term base while he worked the switches on the Missouri Pacific railroad. That Robard spent just fifteen days in Helena, in 1959, and that he can barely remember it, is reason enough to doubt he has a "southerner's typical attachment" to the town. But it also becomes clear that Hazen and Helena both are part of a larger, itinerant pattern in Robard's labouring life. His job satisfaction and security have not notably improved since he departed Arkansas: "From the first, eight years ago, when he had left Hazen and transported himself and her [his wife, Jackie] across the country, and had started to pick work where he could up the Sierras, he had been as desperate as anybody, and every bit as panicked when a job shut down, and had gone off to wherever there was another one opened" (14). To be sure, Robard does not seem conscious that the temporary nature of his work defines his short-term, minute-by-minute, worldview. Nonetheless, he

does summarise “those years of running desperation and internal commotion getting jobs and being anxious” in a telling simile of mechanised manual labour: “a lot of useless barging around, like a man with his sleeve in a thresher” (15).

Recalling his tedious working life in Hazen, Robard is doubtful about “relying” irrationally on Arkansas. He recognises that “there wasn’t any reason to believe the place or anybody in it would turn out any better or kinder or any more understanding than they had when he tried to make it honest, working for old man Rudolph” (43). Why, then, does Robard take yet another temporary job upon arriving back in Arkansas? Indeed, the job, guarding Mark Lambo’s island, is much like the one he performed for Rudolph eight years before. I posit that Robard takes the work not because he feels a special attachment to the state, but because he is acting subconsciously upon a familiar sense of place--and life itself--as being defined by temporary, itinerant work. Robard realises bemusedly that, “[w]ithout even intending, he had gone straight for a job, just like finding one was bone-hard necessity. It was aggravating” (57).

Bearing in mind this liminal dialectic between itinerant labour and place(lessness) in Robard’s life, I would like to flesh out Holditch’s speculative comparison between Binx and Robard. In the previous chapter, we saw how Binx undertakes an abortive “search” of “the South” because he is troubled by the speculative, suburban redevelopment of the region’s historical geography. In contrast, Ford’s Robard has none of the historical, familial or financial investment in “the South” that might make him undertake this kind of search for place. Binx seeks signs of historical-geographical uneven development that signify the survival of an older, more genteel “South.” With a nod to McMurtry, the “search” could be construed as Binx’s own “burden of Southern history” (or historical

geography). But Robard's search for work and a wage is rather more quotidian, with none of the upper-class, angst-ridden resonance of Binx's. Nor is it limited to "the South": Robard has never known anything but mundane manual labour, either in Arkansas or the West.

Ultimately, then, I would suggest that this contingent experience of economic geographies is what really determines Robard's better instinct that he cannot expect Helena to (and the wage metaphor is revealing) "pay him, in a sense, for having been born there." At base, and however little he reflects upon the fact, Robard knows that his sense of place has always been inextricable from, and limited to, financial necessity. For Robard to put his faith in Arkansas simply because it is his birthplace is to fall into metaphysical fallacy--"in a sense" becomes (wilful) innocence. Despite trying to work up a sense of "reliance," Robard knows that there is no Weltyan "sense of place" in this "weedy cotton plant on the skin of the delta" (43) that might mystically vindicate his return. Hence, to speak of "the southerner's typical attachment to place" is to traffic in essentialist notions of "Southernness" and "the South" that elide the social realities of class and labour. Ultimately, the only reason for Robard's return to the South is Beuna, his cousin: they plan to rekindle the lustful fling that started in Helena in 1959. Singularly focused upon the sexual thrill promised by Beuna, Robard has no other reason to search for his place in the South--thus recalling how, in *A Place to Come to*, Jed Tewksbury rejects time, space and even "being Southern" during his sexual relationship with Rozelle in Nashville.

## II

*The Search for Place and Postsouthern Parody: Sam Newel*

If there is a man “carry[ing] the narrative” of *A Piece of My Heart* who also appears to be “carrying the burden of Southern history,” it is Sam Newel. At the time of the novel’s present, Newel is living in Chicago, where he is reluctantly training to be a lawyer while having a sexual affair with *his* cousin, and fellow Mississippian expatriate, Beebe Henley. When we first encounter Newel, he is planning a return trip to Mississippi in order to come to terms with his Southern past. However, Newel’s night-time conversations with Beebe reveal that he does not really know *why* he wants to go home again. Rather, he is working through certain received notions of Southern identity—including “history” and “place”—that have little bearing on his own personal experience.

Newel’s talks with Beebe in the cold Chicago room rather inevitably recall, as Guinn has noted, Quentin Compson in garrulous dialogue with Shreve McCannon in the freezing dorm at Harvard. Newel seems possessed by that need Fred Hobson sees apotheosised in Quentin: the “Southern rage to explain,” to “tell about the South.” Yet Newel also seems to be *consciously* seeking and constructing the kind of dramatic, even neurotic love-hate relationship with the South that was “natural” to Quentin. At one point, Beebe herself asks Newel whether “fucking me lets you get back sneakily at your past” in Mississippi. Though Newel believes that “[p]assions have to come from someplace,” he has to conclude that his past in Mississippi is “not good enough” (73) reason. In other words, Newel well knows that there is no sublimated version of Southern history or (some)place being played out in their sexual relationship (any more than there is in Robard and Beuna’s affair, or than there was in Jed and Rozelle’s).<sup>8</sup>

Beebe also identifies the single event that just might explain Newel's raging focus on the past: the death of his father, beheaded by a rogue load of corrugated pipes while driving through Bastrop, Louisiana (77). However, even Newel himself is unwilling to see this (suitably grotesque) primal scene as the reason for his return to the South: "Do you want me to say that happened to *him*, and I couldn't cope with my past because it was so awful? [...] My father isn't finally important. He's just adhesive for everything" (78-80). Yet one might usefully ask *why* Newel disregards his father's role in his personal past. An explanation begins to emerge when one considers that, like Robard, and in contrast to Quentin or Binx, Newel's personal history maps a "South" that is literally another place, and populated by another class. Newel's father was a travelling salesman who often travelled "[o]ne hundred miles a day, [across] seven states--Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Alabama, Florida, part of Texas." Newel recalls how

We'd drive to some big warehouse and he'd go inside and talk to a man [...] and write up an order. Then he'd leave. Maybe he wouldn't sell anything. That was it. Then he'd go someplace else [...] He loved it so much, I think, it seemed fun to him. And that wasn't the worst. The worst was sitting in all those goddamned rooms, in Hammond, Louisiana, and Tuscaloosa, with nothing at all in them, for *years*. Just come in late in the afternoon, have a drink of whiskey, go down and eat your dinner in some greasy fly-speck café, smoke a King Edward in the lobby, and go back to the *room*, and lie in bed listening to the plumbing fart, until it was late enough to go to sleep. And that was *all*. (80-81)

I quote at some length because here we begin to uncover Newel's problem. He is unable to find the kind of Faulknerian literary drama in his father's life and



labour--and his family's "sense of place" or history--that could turn him into a Quentin. Newel's "And that was *all*" has none of the ironic bathos that Faulkner injected into his fiction by using that phrase at moments of extreme tension, at the terminus of seemingly endless paragraphs. Newel *means* it: he can see nothing noteworthy in his father's itinerant working life across the South. We also note Newel's disbelief that his father could have "loved it [his labour] so much." If Robard exhibits little consciousness about his class-specific or "Southern" identity, Newel's paradox is that he *wants* to feel a Quentin-like alienation from (yet connection to) "the South," but sees his father's working-class life as too trivial, too absurdly "fun," to fulfil the tragic Faulknerian sensibility.<sup>9</sup>

To take this further, I want to suggest that Ford is deliberately constructing Newel as a postmodern *parody* of Southern literature's familiar (Faulknerian or Percyan) white, male, upper-class figural hero. In a telling scene between Newel and Beebe, the former remembers how, when he was a child, "we had a flat tire right on the bridge at Vicksburg" and that "my mother grabbed me and held me so tight I couldn't breathe, until he [his father] had fixed the tire. She said she was afraid of something happening." Newel strongly hints that his mother was afraid his father might kill them all. But Beebe's response is sceptical, even sarcastic: "That's very romantic, but what does it have to do with you?" I would suggest that Beebe here begins to realise that Newel is rhetorically performing a pseudo-literary idea of "the South"--that he is trying desperately to dramatise a personal burden of Southern history. Beebe begins to expose the disjunction between Newel's actual experience, and his rage to explain--or even *invent*--a tragic familial and regional experience. Indeed, Beebe's incredulity toward her cousin's self-conscious Southern discomfort soon prompts Newel to petulantly admit the

performative nature of his past-in-the-present: "So it has to do with me because I say it does" (82-83). Newel's rage to explain his very own burdens of Southern history and place has become a speech act.<sup>10</sup>

When McMurtry deemed *A Piece of My Heart* "neo-Faulknerian," he failed to distinguish that it is Sam Newel, not Richard Ford, whose narrative strategy follows the familiar Faulknerian tropes. It is Newel whose "passion for rhetoric" refers less to his own experience than what Michael Kreyling calls "the Faulkner-Quentin model." Contra McMurtry's criticisms, the Chicago scenes between Beebe and Newel reveal how Ford subtly undermines Newel's "Quentissential" identity and discourse through postsouthern parody.<sup>11</sup>

There is, though, one way in which Newel manages to construct a distinctive sense of "the South" before leaving Chicago on the "lunatic trip [to Mississippi] he couldn't even understand the good sense of" (68). It is also here that Newel's sense of place has something in common with Binx's. For like Binx, Newel rhetorically reconstructs his "South" by contrasting it with Chicago. When Beebe declares herself an acolyte of urban scholar Jane Jacobs and asserts that "the city is put here to solve our problems" (69), Newel responds that "[y]ou should try it on the south side before you make up your mind." To this, Beebe retorts that "I get along with the boogies just fine" (70). This should not be taken as the transparently racist remark it appears to be. Rather, Beebe is slyly parodying, and provocatively challenging, Newel's own image of Chicago as a racialised site of violence. Newel explicitly states this image of Chicago shortly thereafter, contrasting it with a (relatively) favourable vision of the South:

It's [Mississippi's] not any more threatening than it is out there [...] There's goddamn whores right in this building, right below us. When they're around

things can get real *special*, you might say, especially if they're coons, which these ladies certainly are. There's plenty of everything right there, if you want to be scared. Some poor Pakistani managed to get his throat cut standing in the middle of Kenwood Avenue. That's fairly outrageous. (78)

If Newel does not go as far as Binx, who feared Kate's mutation into a "little low-browed olive-skinned big-buttied Mediterranean such as populates the streets and subways of the North," Newel follows Binx by implying a sense of Southern whiteness. When Newel (like Binx a decade before) at last escapes Chicago on a southbound train, his lingering impression of the city is motivated by his general conception of Chicago as a non-white locus of crime and chaos. Having briefly left his bag on a station platform, Newel returns to find it gone. He asks a little boy, one of a "group of well-dressed Negroes," where the bag is. The boy tells him that the "[p]o-lice done got it" (68) but, upon boarding his train, Newel shoots "an accusing look at the Negroes." Though "[n]one of them was holding his bag," Newel still watches as the blacks "grow smaller in the station until they were absorbed" (69)--absorbed back into Newel's own imagined heart of darkness.<sup>12</sup>

Disembarking from the Chicago train in Memphis, Newel begins a vaguely Binx-like search for place and "Southern" identity. Realising that "he had never felt the [Mississippi] river," Newel walks down to the water, driven by a sense that the river "seemed now like a vast and imponderable disadvantage, and made him feel like he needed to know" (87). It is surely this sentence that McMurtry had in mind when he wrote that "the burden of southern history [...] squashes them [Ford's main protagonists] into a mulch of pronouns and pulpy adjectives, of which 'imponderable' is the one I personally have come to dislike the most. If it's

so imponderable, why must everyone keep pondering it, in a fashion at once so tedious and so vague?"<sup>13</sup>

It would appear that Newel's own "imponderable" speculations upon the Mississippi River are a perfect example of "neo-Faulknerism." However, I want to argue further that Ford is *parodying* the Faulknerian figural hero. Unsatisfied with simply dipping his hand, Newel wades into the water, and is dragged down by the current. Again, one almost automatically recalls the Quentissential intertextual moment: Quentin's suicide in the Charles River. However, having half-heartedly flirted with just such a suitably "Southern" literary suicide, Newel recognises he is "risking self-annihilation without even willing it so" (87). The scene becomes less tragic than comic as Newel realises "that his shorts were now gone and he was floating with his privates adangle in the cold current, prey to any browsing fish" (88). Eventually, Newel is rescued by two bargemen who, for all that they seem like stereotypes from a primer on the Southern grotesque, appear less ridiculous than Newel. The comedy repeats itself as farce when Newel again almost drowns while staying on Mark Lamb's island (184). On both occasions, Newel's self-conscious fascination with the "imponderable" Mississippi river shows him acting out the "learned behavior" of which, Kreyling observes, "Quentin's 'experience' of the South and Southern history is authorization." Ford's intertextual parody implies that the tropes of Southern (literary) history and place legitimised and naturalised by "the Faulkner-Quentin model" are no longer tenable. For despite his own neo-Faulknerian efforts, such familiar, fictional figures are irrelevant to Newel's actual experience.<sup>14</sup>

The pseudo-suicide attempts also suggest that Newel is behaving in a way he has "learned" from Walker Percy. In a pioneering essay on Ford's third novel,

*The Sportswriter*, Edward Dupuy applied Percy's concept of the "ex-suicide" to the narrator, Frank Bascombe. Yet Percy's theory can be applied more literally to Newel. Percy adumbrates the "ex-suicide" hypothesis in *Lost in the Cosmos* (1983):

Suppose you elect suicide. Very well, you exit. Then what? What happens after you exit? Nothing much. Very little, indeed. After a ripple or two, the water closes over your head as if you had never existed [...]

Now, in the light of this alternative, consider the other alternative. You can elect suicide, but you decide not to. What happens? [...] Where you might have been dead, you are alive. The sun is shining.

Suddenly, you feel like a castaway on an island. You can't believe your good fortune.<sup>15</sup>

We have already seen how Newel flirts with, then rejects, "self-annihilation" in the Mississippi river. However, he diverges from Percy's ex-suicide in that, rather than feeling "good fortune" after (twice) escaping death by water, he regresses into a listless funk. Ford's gentle parody of Percy's ex-suicide theory also helps to elucidate Holditch's analogy between Binx and Newel. In *The Momegoer*, Percy portrays Binx's awakening to the "search" in terms similar to the ex-suicide's regeneration. Binx feels "as if I had to come to myself on a strange island," and he describes himself as a "castaway" who "pokes around the neighborhood and [...] doesn't miss a trick."<sup>16</sup> As we saw in Chapter 3, Binx begins his sporadic search for place in the South by critically re-examining his own "neighborhood" (Gentilly) before moving into older Southern spaces (Bayou des Allemands, the Garden District). But the ex- (or pseudo-) suicide Newel lacks even the ebbing drive of the cynical Binx. Confining himself to Lamb's island during his stay in Mississippi, Newel never really searches for (his) place in the

larger "South." Nor does the island itself yield anything that might make his past usable or unburdened. Eventually, Newel decides that Mississippi is "boring as shit" (229) and simply returns to Chicago. At the moment of this bathetic epiphany, Ford applies to Newel an extended metaphor that once again recalls Percy's "castaway." However, unlike Binx, Ford's castaway can no longer see "the South" as his island. Newel's metaphorical beach proves to be, of all places, Chicago:

It was the day to leave, without doubt. Get the bus to Memphis and be on the late train [...] There was a squeamish serenity in that, of choosing the only thing left [...] It was the compromise satisfaction a person got, he thought, when he is washed up on the beach of some country after spending weeks floating around on a tree limb, too far from home ever to hope to be deposited *there*, and satisfied to be on land, no matter really which land it happened to be (225).

Finally, then, Ford's pseudo-suicide simply abandons his attempt to perform a Quentissential identity, and to enact a Binx-like "search" for place. In Newel's pragmatic reversal of Binx's (and his own earlier) escape *from* the urban North *back* to the South, *A Piece of My Heart's* postsouthern parody of "place" reaches its apogee.

### III

#### *"This Little Cut-off Tit of Nothing": Mark Lamb's Island and the Problem of Place*

So far, I have tried to show that, rather than neo-Faulknerism, there is a sophisticated *postsouthernism* operating in *A Piece of My Heart*. Ford focuses upon one working-class protagonist whose sense of place is peripatetic and highly

contingent upon labour, and another whose sense of place and burden of history serves to parody Faulkner and Percy. However, it is time we asked why Ford's debut is ultimately an unsatisfying novel. Guinn has called Ford's debut his "weakest effort"; like McMurtry, Guinn bemoans the pernicious influence of Faulkner. More inclined than Guinn to see postsouthern parody operating in *A Piece of My Heart*, I want to suggest other reasons for the novel's failings.

I would argue that Ford maroons not only Newel, but also the novel itself, on Mark Lamb's island. To be sure, Ford does seem to want to use the island to raise interesting issues: specifically, the relationship between capital, land and place, and the increasingly untenable opposition between "North" and "South" in a postsouthern, capitalist America. These are important issues not least because, as we shall see in Chapters 5 and 6, they become central to Ford's later fiction. Lamb--Newel's host, Robard's employer and ostensibly the island's sole owner and proprietor--has bribed the Corps of Engineers to erase the island from its maps. In doing so, Lamb believes that the island "has ceased to exist for the rest of the world" (164). This lack of cartographic evidence also enables Lamb to claim that the island is part of his own home state of Mississippi, rather than Arkansas. But Lamb also constructs a familiar and more telling opposition: between "the South" and "the North." Lamb indicts Newel as "a fish" who "belong[s] back up in Lake Michigan where it's cold and wet, not down here where people's got blood" (216). Of course, this attack is not a little ironic given Newel's own earlier attempt to distinguish Mississippi from Chicago; it also echoes Binx's smugly partisan contrast between Lake Michigan and Lake Pontchartrain. However, Lamb's antipathy toward the North is, like Binx's, driven by an ulterior motive. For it transpires that Lamb does not own the island at all:

he rents it from a company called "Chicago Pulp and Paper" (168). Sounding like a grotesque amalgam of Binx and Newel deriding the "Mediterraneans" and "coons" of Chicago, Lamb rails at the "wops" and "greasy dagos" (169) who run Chicago Pulp and Paper. He splutters that "[i]t's an in-dignity to suffer their presence on this island, like this was some part of De-troit or one of them other hellish places" (170). These racist words reveal Lamb's fear that, at (the economic) base, the island effectively belongs to, is part of, the North. Lamb's emphasis on the island's Mississippian status turns out to have been entirely performative. That Chicago Pulp and Paper owns and regularly surveys the island shows that Lamb's power over the island was only ever textual, written on to--or rather, written out of--the Corps of Engineers' maps. Ford's own narrative cartography suggests that, in the last instance, sense of place is more contingent upon property rights than the regionalist rhetoric of residents.

More generally, however, the island mires *A Piece of My Heart* in the Southern literary tradition that Ford so deftly parodies elsewhere in the novel. Having indicted "critics, particularly English critics," for stereotyping *A Piece of My Heart* as the work of a "Southern writer," Nick Hornby is forced to admit that, "without wishing to squeeze Ford uncomfortably into any tradition, [Mark] Lamb is the kind of Southern grotesque that literary critics would seize upon." I would seize upon Lamb's surreal death as the most obvious signifier of O'Connor's residual influence. The grotesque also appears on the island in the stylised form of glass-eyed Fidelia, and through tales of Fidelia's mad brother, John (218). Ironically Ford, like Newel, seems to have succumbed to a form of Southern literary "learned behavior." The narrative's turn toward this hermetic realm of the grotesque feels like going south to a very old place.<sup>17</sup>



Ultimately, perhaps the island's most telling role is to prevent Newel from discovering what "the South" is *really* becoming circa 1971. The narrative provides one vivid hint that, elsewhere in Mississippi, there has occurred dramatic socio-spatial change. In one of the last and more interesting exchanges between the two central protagonists, Newel's continued insistence that one's (Southern) past impacts upon one's present prompts Robard to launch into an unusually voluble tirade:

Shit! If the only thing you can bear is just coming back to this little cut-off tit of nothing, somebody ought to tell you something [...] If you *did* really want to come down here to live, somewhere, you wouldn't choose this place, cause everything's trapped right here, and I'm positive you wouldn't recognize nothin else. Down in Jackson there ain't nothing but a bunch of empty lots and people flying around in Piper Comanches looking for some way to make themselves rich. It wouldn't feel nothing at all anymore, to *you*.  
(230)

A "little cut-off tit of nothing": Robard's words vigorously suggest just why the island tells Newel little about "the South" circa 1971. For all the pseudo-literary tropes through which Newel rages to explain or invent his "Southernness," his putative search for place is doomed to meaninglessness because the "baronial and ridiculous" island can shed nothing on either his (or his father's) itinerant working-class past, or the redevelopment underway elsewhere in present-day Mississippi.

Confined to this "cut-off tit of nothing," Newel's search (such as it is) necessarily runs down. All that remains is for him to come to the bathetic realisation that Mississippi (really Mark Lamb's "Mississippi," which is all that

Newel experiences) is “boring as shit,” and cast himself back to Chicago. Frank Shelton argues optimistically that “because he [Newel] recognizes the futility of searching for meaning in the South and his Southern past, [he] may be freed to make life for himself.” Yet there is no real sense that Newel has solved what Percy would call his “predicament of placement.” When Robard asks whether “[y]ou like Chicago better now,” Newel responds: “I don’t care” (229).<sup>8</sup>

With Newel gone, the reader is left alone with Robard. If Newel’s Southern literary self and search for place disintegrated during his time on the island, Robard seems to have been entirely unmarked by the experience. Leaving the island after Lamb’s death, to Robard “[i]t all seemed like some place he hadn’t ever been but knew about, something away from his life altogether now” (279). Here we have another example of Robard’s minute-by-minute philosophy of life, and his highly contingent sense of place. Like Hazen, where he worked for Rudolph, the island, where he worked for Lamb, means nothing to him afterward. However, because Robard is so profoundly unconscious of the social relations (class and labour) that dominate his life, the narrative finally narrows down to his sexual relations with Beuna. The brutal denouement of this affair leads indirectly to Robard’s murder. Finally then, the sly, funny parody that Ford filtered through Newel is swamped by what Hornby calls the “grim nihilism” of Robard’s death. Ironically, the conclusion to *A Piece of My Heart* recalls Ford’s own assessment of Percy’s *Lancelot*, published a year later. There, Ford writes that “if it is true that *Lancelot* is written as parody, it’s true only part of the time, and I’m afraid I lose the thread of intention.” Ford could have been critiquing his own recent novel: as postsouthern parody succumbs to grim nihilism, and as the working-class geographies of a postsouthern America stretching from Arkansas to California

give way to the grotesque island, one loses the thread of intention in *A Piece of My Heart*.<sup>19</sup>

Yet there lingers the puzzle of Robard's uncharacteristic, socially aware assessment of Jackson's transformation. Robard's diatribe points to another Mississippi that Ford might have introduced into the novel. If Ford wanted to write "about the South in a way that nobody would ever recognize as being southern," why did he portray a "cut off tit of nothing" that, at best, pastiches Faulkner and O'Connor, rather than mapping the dramatic socio-spatial change in and around his birthplace? An explanation may be found in Ford's "An Urge for Going: Why I Don't Live Where I Used to Live" (1992). In this essay, Ford writes that: "Place [...] is supposed to be important to us Southerners [...] But where I grew up was a bland, unadhesive place--Jackson, Mississippi--a city in love with the suburban Zeitgeist the way Mill was in love with utility, a city whose inert character I could never get interested in."<sup>20</sup> Here, then, Ford offers another sceptical interrogation of the Southern sense of place, but more specifically in terms of capitalist redevelopment. If "An Urge for Going" echoes Robard's critique of Jackson, it also recalls Ford's 1977 essay on Percy, in which he made a wider point about the redevelopment--even destruction--of Southern place:

The south has become the regrettable "Sunbelt," in case you haven't noticed. And I'm afraid the Sunbelt is buckled on to stay, and the jury is not even impaneled yet that will judge the literature that such a strange new territory will produce [...] The south is not a place any more: it's a Belt, a business proposition, which is the nearest thing to anonymity the economy recognizes.<sup>21</sup>

In both 1977 and 1992, Ford implies that the reproduction, or erasure, of “place” by Sunbelt capitalism has produced a “strange new territory” that is not even *interesting*. As Ford identifies and indicts this *post*-South, one begins to understand why he never wrote about Jackson in *A Piece of My Heart*. Indeed, because Ford was accused of being “neo-Faulknerian” despite *parodying* the Southern literary “sense of place” and mapping an alternative, working-class South, one suspects he was even less inclined to write about “the regrettable ‘Sunbelt.’” Instead, after *A Piece of My Heart*, Ford decided “to get my work out of the South as much as I possibly could.” When McMurtry counselled Ford to “weed his garden of some of the weeds and cockleburrs of his tradition,” the Texan could hardly have anticipated that this “neo-Faulknerian” writer would abandon his native garden altogether: especially not for New Jersey and Detroit. However, by relocating his fiction beyond “the South,” Ford’s postsouthern interrogation of Southern literary shibboleths like “sense of place” became far more radical. For all its faults, *A Piece of My Heart* remains interesting not least because it anticipates the more sophisticated and successful postsouthernism played out in *The Sportswriter* (1986) and *Independence Day* (1995). The next two chapters will consider these two novels, and how Ford maps in detail the capitalist geographies of postsouthern America.<sup>22</sup>

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Land and Literary Speculations: The Postsouthern World-as-Text in Richard Ford's *The Sportswriter*

When *The Sportswriter's* narrator, Frank Bascombe, begins by stating that "I am a sportswriter [...] My life [...] has not been and isn't now a bad one at all," he eerily echoes Binx Bolling's comment that "I am a stock and bond broker [...] It is not a bad life at all." Indeed, many critics have noted *The Moviegoer's* influence upon *The Sportswriter*. However, I want to begin my analysis of *The Sportswriter* by arguing that Ford's often elusive and elaborate scepticism towards literary constructions of "the South" enacts a significant *shift* in the postsouthern sensibility. Extending his postsouthern project beyond the (formal and spatial) limits of *A Piece of My Heart*, Ford also produces a complex intertextual critique of the Southern "sense of place" presented in *The Moviegoer*.<sup>1</sup>

#### I

##### "No Particular Sense of Their Place": Frank's family in Biloxi

Early in *The Sportswriter*, just before recounting his coming of age in Mississippi, Frank Bascombe makes a disarming disclaimer:

All we really want is to get to the point where the past can explain nothing about us and we can get on with life. Whose history can ever reveal very much? In my view Americans put too much emphasis on their pasts as a way of defining themselves, which can be death-dealing. I know I'm always

heartsick in novels [...] when the novelist makes his clanking, obligatory trip into the Davy Jones locker of the past. (30)

We encounter here a self-reflexive narrative strategy operating on two levels. Firstly, the apparent producer of the text entitled "*The Sportswriter*," Frank Bascombe, preemptively undercuts any attempt on the reader's part to define him according to his Southern history and homeplace. Secondly, Richard Ford begins extending his own, omniscient-authorial interrogation of "Southern literature" through the mediating figure of his character-narrator. For despite the wider reference to Americans, and beyond the self-conscious *anti-literariness*, Frank's opening gambit also disrupts our established sense of Southern (literary) identity. In notable contrast to Sam Newel, Frank does not feel at all obliged to define his "Southernness" according to such familiar tropes as "the past in the present" or "the burden of southern history."<sup>2</sup>

Even the proto-postsouthern experience depicted in Walker Percy's work is alien to Frank. Anticipating a similar point I made regarding Robard Hewes and Sam Newel in *A Piece of My Heart*, Jeffrey Folks has noted that "Frank's own heritage (and Ford's as well)" is working-class, and therefore "contrasts markedly with the privileged milieu of Walker Percy's fiction." Frank observes that his parents had "no particular sense of their *place* in history's continuum." Whereas Aunt Emily in *The Moviegoer* harps on the stoical heroism of the Bolling clan since the Civil War, Frank's parents were "without a daunting conviction about their own consequence," which to Frank "seems like a fine lineage to me still" (30). But in fully chronotopic terms, one can also say that Frank's parents had no "sense of their *place*" in the historical *geography* of the South. They were born in rural Iowa and passed through Davenport, El Reno and Cicero before settling in

Biloxi, on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Binx observes that his uncle combines the “old-world charm” of Garden District society with the “new-world business methods” of his stockbroking partnership. In contrast, Frank’s father worked in the post-Second World War military-industrial complex, “plating ships with steel at the Ingalls ship-building company” (31) in Biloxi. Whereas Binx is able to recover, or cynically simulate, some Southern “spirit-presence of place” at his father’s old duck club, Frank cannot conjure a metaphysical aesthetics of place from his memories of Gulf Pines military school. Frank writes: “What I remember of the place was a hot parade grounds surrounded by sparse pine trees [...] a stale shallow lake where I learned to sail, a smelly beach and boat house, hot brown stucco classroom buildings and white barrack houses that reeked with mops” (32). Through Frank’s reminiscence, Ford suggests a working-class “ordinary, modern existence” (30) in Biloxi that contrasts with (but occurs in the same timespan as) Binx’s petty-bourgeois “ordinary life” in Gentilly. Like Robard and Newel, Frank grew up in another “South.”<sup>3</sup>

However, since that time Frank’s life (like Newel’s) has gone North toward home. When Frank was fourteen, his father died, and his mother “went to work in a large hotel called the Buena Vista in Mississippi City as the night cashier.” Here, she met and married a jeweller from Chicago and moved to a “strangely suburban ranch-style house” in a Jewish neighbourhood of Skokie, Illinois. As in *A Piece of My Heart*, here Ford interrogates the typological opposition in “Southern literature” (and Southern literary criticism) between “the North” and “the South”—not least as Binx constructs that opposition in *The Moviegoer*. For Frank’s youthful experience of Illinois stands in stark contrast to Binx’s Northern exposure to the same state. Though Frank notes that it was “a town where I had

no attachments,” he never scorns Skokie in the manner that Binx indicted Wilmette as the vanishing point of the Northern “Nowhere.” In fact, once his mother relocated to Skokie, Frank had no more attachments in Mississippi. Hence, upon graduating from the military school in Gulfport, he left the South and “enrolled at the University of Michigan” (34). As we shall see, it is to Michigan that Frank makes a sentimental homecoming. Just as Jed Tewksbury’s “place to come to” was South Dakota, not Alabama, so Frank returns to Detroit, rather than Mississippi.

*The Sportswriter* starts interrogating the binary opposition between Northern “non-places” and the Southern “(sense of) place” even *before* Frank recounts his youthful relocation to Illinois and Michigan. In the opening chapter, Frank and his ex-wife (literally referred to as “X” throughout) are visiting the grave of their son, Ralph, who died two years before the novel’s present. X picks this choice moment to tell Frank that he has not been “well enough armored for the unexpected.” As Frank recounts it, X believes this is

because I didn’t know my parents very well, had gone to a military school, and grown up in the south, which was full of betrayers and secret-keepers and untrustworthy people, which I agree is true, though I never knew any of them. All that originated, she said, with the outcome of the Civil War. It was much better to have grown up, she said, as she did, in a place with no apparent character, where there is nothing ambiguous around to confuse you or complicate things, where the only thing anybody ever thought seriously about was the weather. (19)

X echoes Binx’s definition of “the South” and its sense of place to the degree that she contrasts it with a Northern “Nowhere”—her own (home) “place



with no apparent character" in Michigan. However, making his first postsouthern move, Ford has X slant this comparison in a distinctly *anti*-Southern fashion. She insinuates that the implicit "placeness" of "the South" is that of a dysfunctional, even sinister society burdened by Appomattox. To the extent that X affirms the virtues of the North/Midwest, she sounds less like Binx than Jed celebrating Ripley City as the "self-contained, self-fulfilling, complete" antithesis of Dugton. But Ford executes a second postsouthern twist. Though Frank laconically agrees with X's negative assessment of the South, he adds the subtle proviso that he never knew any Southerners like those his ex-wife evokes. Frank is ready to concur with X's criticism, but accepts neither its influence upon him, nor its applicability to his own lived experience of the region. Whereas Jed had to struggle with the story of his father's death appearing less "real" than a scene "in one of those novels about the South," Frank has never even had any such rural, grotesque experience. Rather, Frank's only moderately vivid memory of *his* father--and X *does* seem to have been right about the lack of contact between Frank and Bascombe senior--is on the golf links at Biloxi's Air Force Base (31). If there is a (post)southern literary echo here, it is of Percy's claim that, whereas "Faulkner and all the rest of them were always going on about the tragic sense of history [...] My South was always the New South [...] the country club, of people playing golf."<sup>4</sup>

At this point, it would be useful to discuss another dizzying dimension to *The Sportswriter's* postsouthern practice that, if not directly bearing upon "place," is of importance to my argument. This dimension is both self-reflexive and intertextual, and emerges when Frank recounts his brief career as a novelist. It transpires that, despite his own "ordinary, modern existence" as a boy in Biloxi,

Frank went on to write fiction that regurgitated a veritable gumbo of Southern literary clichés. Frank recalls how in 1967, returning to college after being discharged from the Marines due to a serious illness, he began to consider writing a novel. Evidently, this novel was autobiographical, up to a point:

about a bemused young southerner who joins the Navy but gets discharged with a mysterious disease, goes to New Orleans and loses himself into a hazy world of sex and drugs and rumored gun-running and a futile attempt to reconcile a vertiginous present with the guilty memories of not dying alongside his Navy comrades, all of which is climaxed in a violent tryst with a Methodist minister's wife who seduces him in an abandoned slave-quarters, though other times too, after which his life is shattered and he disappears permanently into the Texas oil fields. It was all told in a series of flashbacks. (42)

Frank's summary suggests that he wrote *Night Wing* under the anxiety-ridden influence of Faulkner. To cite Harold Bloom, *Night Wing* sounds like a "weak" rewriting--rather than strong "misreading"--of Faulkner's *Flags in the Dust*. In the figure of the "bemused young southerner" returning to his native region burdened by "the guilty memories of not dying alongside his Navy comrades," Frank seems to allude, wittingly or not, to John Sartoris, the traumatised World War One veteran in Faulkner's novel. When the "bemused young southerner" in *Night Wing* is said to confront his "past in the present," one senses a weak, stylised take on the Faulknerian-Tateian theme. After all, John Sartoris also had to deal with (narratives of) his ancestors' legendary heroism in the Confederate army. To put it another way, Frank plays out in fiction the Faulknerian-Southern figural heroism that Sam Newel witlessly performed in *A Piece of My Heart*.<sup>5</sup>

All in all, Frank appears to have written a "Southern" novel according to certain traditional tropes, but entirely contrary to his own "ordinary, modern" experience. Fred Hobson has observed that Frank's juvenilia seems "nearly a parody of the usual racially charged, Christ-haunted southern production." One might clarify that, on Frank's part, *Night Wing* was never parody, but rather--to invoke Fredric Jameson's distinction--pastiche, "the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, without any of parody's ulterior motives." The postsouthern *parody* emerges from Frank's (or Ford's) wry précis of *Night Wing* in the present narrative, "*The Sportswriter*."<sup>6</sup>

When Frank recounts how, as a budding young author, he moved to New Jersey in 1970, Ford himself extends his postsouthern, intertextual dialogue with Percy. At this time, Frank was working on another novel, *Tangier*, while living in New York. However, one morning he woke up with "a feeling we had to get out of town pronto so that my work could flourish in a place where I knew no one and no one knew me and I could perfect my important writer's anonymity." So it was that Frank and his wife moved to "New Jersey: a plain, unprepossessing and unexpectant landscape, I thought, and correctly" (45). Frank recounts how he "wrote a piece in a local magazine about 'Why I Live Where I Live' in which I talked about the need to find a place [i.e., Haddam] that is in most ways 'neutral'" (46). In a 1980 essay entitled "Why I Live Where I Live," Percy described his Louisiana hometown, Covington, in similar terms, though rather than calling Covington "neutral," Percy termed it a "nonplace." To this extent, Percy evinces a postsouthern scepticism towards "place"; he notes wryly that Covington "is in the Deep South, which is supposed to have a strong sense of place." Yet Percy proceeds to uphold "sense of place" as a special "Southern" value by

emphasising Covington's "nearness to New Orleans," which he says is "very much of a place." Percy also presumes that a "Southern writer" who has relocated to "a nondescript Northern place" will still want to write about the South.<sup>7</sup>

But in *The Sportswriter*, Frank begins to appreciate New Jersey on its own terms, not just as a writer's "neutral" retreat, or as "a nondescript Northern place." Frank even quits writing stories altogether and takes a job as a sportswriter.<sup>8</sup> Having once tried to cultivate New Orleans' Gothic mystery in *Night Wing*, Frank now uses his present, non-fictional narrative to celebrate Haddam instead: "a town like New Orleans defeats itself. It longs for a mystery it doesn't have and never will, if it ever did. New Orleans should take my advice and take after Haddam, where it is not at all hard for a literalist to contemplate the world" (54). I would suggest that Frank's refusal to regard New Orleans as unique expresses Ford's own postsouthern incredulity towards both the privileged "placeness" afforded New Orleans, and the prejudice directed at Northern "nonplaces," in Percy's work. When asked about Frank's antipathy toward New Orleans, Ford explicitly stated his quarrel with Percy and drew attention to the socio-economic reality of "the Big Easy":

That's an answering knell to one of Walker's characters in *The Last Gentleman*, who says the place where I was living when I read those books-- Ann Arbor--was a *non-place*. That was me, basically, lobbing a salvo back over Walker's wall [...] New Orleans steepes itself in its history and obfuscates all of its fundamental urbanness and modern problems by turning its head [...] The fact is that it's a great big urban complex with a

theme park in the middle, and everything else about New Orleans is just like every other city in America.<sup>9</sup>

So far, my reading of *The Sportswriter* has been chiefly concerned with the ways in which Ford's postsouthern parody interrogates received textual constructions of "the South" and its "sense of place." To paraphrase Michael Kreyling, we have seen how Ford's text adjusts or lightens the burden of southern place it must necessarily carry in the presence of Faulkner's Mississippi or Percy's Louisiana. Nonetheless, to assess further how Ford depicts the material production and social reality of place in *The Sportswriter*, one must turn away from Frank's boyhood memories of the South, and focus more closely upon the postsouthern America in which Frank now lives, works and owns property. By considering Frank's everyday life in Haddam, New Jersey, I will show how Ford further critiques the Percyan image of "the North." However, I shall also emphasise the complex ambiguities of *The Sportswriter's* postsouthern sense of place. For unlike Frank, Ford does not uncritically celebrate everyday life in the capitalist, (sub)urban landscapes of New Jersey--no more than Percy, rather than Binx, celebrates land speculation and real estate development in Louisiana. Instead, Ford employs a subtle irony to expose the socio-economic realities that Frank omits from his narrative cartographies of postsouthern America.<sup>10</sup>

## II

### *Frank in New Jersey*

As we saw in Chapter 3, Binx Bolling's "peaceful existence" in Gentilly is "complicated" by the possibility of a spatialised "search" that impels Binx to embark upon insomniacal strolls amidst the "splendid" but spectral new houses

of his suburban neighbourhood. On his own “after dark” walks through the “winding, bowery streets” of Haddam, Frank “looked in at these houses [...] the sound of laughing and glasses tinkling and spirited chatter floating out, and thought to myself: what good rooms these are. What complete life is here” (57). Unlike Binx, Frank is not actively involved in the material construction of suburbia. Yet, whereas Binx at least thinks critically about capitalist land speculation and real estate development, Frank has not even begun to question the production of place in Haddam. Instead, he celebrates Haddam as an “Anyplace,” comparable to “grinning, toe-tapping Terre Haute or wide-eyed Bismarck, with stable property values, regular garbage pick-up, good drainage, ample parking” (109-110). Once again, Frank here advocates the virtues of the archetypal “Northern” small town that Binx contemptuously dismissed as “Nowhere.” However, Frank’s “good rooms” worldview ignores--and his mental (and textual) map of Haddam and its environs tends to elide--the existence of other, less privileged loci.

Frank does seem aware that his hometown is a wealthy enclave. He notes the substantial presence of white-collar corporate professionals: “Editors, publishers, *Time* and *Newsweek* writers, CIA agents, entertainment lawyers, business analysts, plus the presidents of a number of great corporations that mold opinion, all live along these curving roads or out in the country in big secluded houses.” He also notes that local Republicans emphasise “a conservator’s clear view about property values” based upon “the rule that *location is everything*.” Evidently, the speculative exchange-value of real estate helps to maintain Haddam’s exclusive status. Yet despite his own working-class background in Mississippi, Frank skims over the divisions of class, labour and race that exist in

Haddam. He blithely incorporates local African-Americans and other less privileged residents into an imagined community of happy Haddamites: "Even the servant classes, who are mostly Negroes, seem fulfilled in their summery, keyboard-awning side streets down Wallace Hill behind the hospital, where they own their own homes" (56). Frank distances himself from both the "small, monied New England émigré contingent" and the "smaller southern crowd," claiming affiliation with "the other, largest group [...] who act as if we're onto something fundamental that's not a matter of money" (55). However, Frank has already admitted that his ability to partake of "the best of what New Jersey offers" is precisely determined by the "matter of money." For Frank mentions in passing that his "sound house" in Haddam was bought with "movie money" accrued when a producer optioned his short story collection, *Blue Autumn*, in 1970 (45).<sup>11</sup>

At this point, we encounter a succession of self-reflexive, postsouthern turns to the novel's representation of place. Though Frank never published *Night Wing* itself (the manuscript was lost in the mail), he did publish "a reduced version" in *Blue Autumn*. Earlier, I quoted Hobson's point that *Night Wing* seems to be a parody of the standard "southern [literary] production." Once mediated through Jameson's theory of pastiche as a particularly "postmodern cultural production" complicit with late capitalism, Hobson's term intones the *economic* motive that might have informed young Frank's "Southern" literary labour. For there is a suspicion that, as a self-consciously "southern production," *Night Wing*/"Night Wing" exemplifies what Scott Romine calls "conspicuous Southernness": the profitable literary (re)production of familiar, marketable "sign[s] of southernness." What is more, "Southern literature," postsouthern

“place” and the cash nexus become inextricably entwined in *The Sportswriter* itself. Firstly, the “conspicuous Southernness” of the revised “Night Wing” helped to generate the surplus value that Frank speculated in New Jersey property. Yet whomever we regard as the author of the text, Frank or Ford, *literary production* in and of *The Sportswriter* never operates in some purely aesthetic sphere; it is inseparable from the *economic production* of place itself. For there is another twist: the link between Frank’s literary production and his land speculation echoes Ford’s own experience. In 1987, Ford told Kay Bonetti that he sold *A Piece of My Heart* “to the movies and made some money and bought a house in New Jersey.” In his essay on Faulkner’s *The Hamlet*, Joseph Uργο observes that “[t]he term *speculation* conjoins real estate and literary aesthetics into a seamless definition.” Uργο’s point seems borne out by the experience of both Frank and Ford. Their respective speculations in the literary market have become equivalent to, exchangeable with, their speculations in the property market.<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless, I want to insist that there are significant *differences* in Frank and Ford’s attitudes toward place and its literary-economic production, speculation and representation. In a telling moment, Frank admits that since trading fiction for sportswriting, he no longer “care[s] to risk speculating” upon “the large world.” Instead, he simply accepts “[t]hat we all look at it from someplace,” a *Weltanschauung* that, he believes, “isn’t enough for literature” (57-58). Frank effectively admits that, since he stopped writing fiction, he has rejected what Uργο calls the “intellectual” definition of speculation (as *opposed* to the “real-estate term”): “the human capacity of ratiocination--testing human vision against the nature of reality.” Instead, Frank has adopted a *post-literary* worldview that he calls “literalist.” In this literalist mode, Frank feels able to accept and enjoy the



“mysteries” of everyday life (which a “factualist” like his ex-wife cannot (138-139)). The problem is that, since limiting himself to literalism, immersing himself in “mystery,” Frank has refused to recognise the capitalist socio-spatial reality around him. Or to put it another way, Frank no longer “care[s] to risk speculating” *intellectually* (i.e., critically) upon his own local, social geography because he has speculated *financially* in it. As such, he lauds Haddam for being “as straightforward and plumb-literal as a fire hydrant, which more than anything else makes it the present place it is” (109). The literalist who scathingly criticised New Orleans yet finds “meaningful mystery” (54) in New Jersey, a place that, as we will see, actually *mystifies* its own geographical uneven development.<sup>13</sup>

In a thoughtful essay on *The Sportswriter*, Edward Dupuy argues persuasively that “Frank is a man who sees the world as a text to be read. Since he claims no system--no myth--to order his reading, he relents to the text of the world.”<sup>14</sup> Dupuy’s suggestion that Frank “sees the world as a text” is plausible and useful: indeed, the literalist’s own text reveals that he does “read” the world around him. For example, driving along Route 33 in New Jersey, Frank asserts that “[a]n American would be crazy to reject such a place, since it is the most diverting and readable of landscapes, and the language is always American” (58). But in response to Dupuy, I would say that Frank is diverted from critically speculating upon (rather than financially speculating in) New Jersey’s capitalist landscapes precisely *because* he uncritically “relents” to a superficial and selective “reading” of them. To the extent that Frank believes the New Jersey Turnpike is “beautiful” (183), his postsouthern worldview continues to challenge an Agrarian-Southern aesthetics of place/anti-development. As Joel Garreau has observed, “[t]he view along the New Jersey Turnpike is so appalling that Dixie planners specifically

mention that state as what they don't want to see their world become."<sup>15</sup> However, Frank's "relenting" literalism prevents him from *critically* seeing the grim, uneven (post)industrial landscape alongside the Turnpike. He does not test his "human vision" against the true "nature of [capitalist] reality." Instead, Frank insists it is better to "[s]top searching" than "remain up in the dubious airs searching for some right place that never existed and never will" (59). Matthew Guinn "hear[s] the echo of Thoreau" in these words. We might more pertinently note that Frank sounds like the complacent Binx, the Binx of the "Little Way," driving along the increasingly commercialised Gulf Coast, "past Howard Johnson's and the motels." Only when reawakening to "the search" does Binx decide he cannot bear "the anonymity of our little car-space" and "the malaise" of "ten thousand handsome cars" congesting the coast. For now Frank, the literalist who has not even started "searching," remains content driving toward "the caressing literalness of the New Jersey coastal shelf" (158), cruising through the Garden State "as indistinguishable from my fellow Jerseyites as a druggist from Sea Girt" (87).<sup>16</sup>

But Frank does not just "read" the world-as-text: he also writes it. As the readers of Frank's text, we should exercise the proper scepticism when Frank begins to incorporate the "American" language of capitalist place production into his own text. In *The Moviegoer*, a defining sign of New Orleans' suburban redevelopment is the banner hanging over Gentilly's movie theatre proclaiming "Where Happiness Costs So Little." In *The Sportsman*, Bascombe observes a roadside billboard for a new housing complex on the outskirts of Haddam: "*An Attractive Retirement Waits Just Ahead.*" But unlike Binx, Frank has lost all sense of irony or critical distance. Apparently unconcerned by the way in which, as Ford

has written elsewhere, “the language used to signify our pleasure is being rereferenced by the lexicographers of American business,” Frank removes the quotation marks and recapitulates this “American” language in his own words: “An attractive retirement is Pheasant Run & Meadow” (59). Frank thus uncritically relents to a capitalist world(view) and lexicon in which place has been reduced to, re-referenced as, real estate.<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately, one might usefully replace Dupuy’s theory of Frank “relenting” to the world-as-text with another Percyan formulation from *Lost in the Cosmos*. Ever since the death of his son, Ralph, and his subsequent divorce from X, Frank has tried to solve his existential “predicament of placement vis-à-vis the world” through what Percy calls an “immanence of consumption.” Drawing on Percy’s “Why I Live Where I Live,” one can say that Frank’s specific “species of consumption” is the consumption of *places*. This consumption of places ranges from local developments like Pheasant Meadow to the “literal and anonymous cities of the nation, your Milwaukees, your St Louises, your Seattles, your Detroits, even your New Jerseys” (13). Without knowing whether Frank plans to sell his latest, autobiographical manuscript to the publishers of *Blue Autumn*, one can say that, by consuming and incorporating the ostensibly “readable” language of land speculation into his own narrative, Frank “speculates” textually in a capitalistic way of seeing and writing the world.<sup>18</sup>

However, Ford offers a subtle critique of Frank’s world-as-text, and the way in which it is conjoined with the “American” language of land speculation. By emphasising the *difference* between Frank and Ford as authors of, and narrative cartographers in, *The Sportswriter*--by noting how Ford’s irony exposes the limited, literalist worldview expounded in Frank’s sportswriterly text--I do not mean to

imply that Ford, unlike Frank, holds to some notion that literature is “transcendent” (22). The fact that Ford subtly alludes to the equivalence between his own land and literary speculations hardly suggests that he regards fiction as a cultural production that always retains an essential or autonomous truth-value. Nonetheless, Ford’s critique emerges through the lacunae in Frank’s “own” text--lacunae that are there precisely because Frank has refused both Binx-like “searching” in, and intellectual speculation upon, the “large world.” Frank’s world-as-text begins to unravel during a jaunt to one of those “literal and anonymous cities” that he cites, Detroit. By analysing Frank’s representation of Michigan, we can see more precisely how Ford’s sceptical, textual practice of place once again challenges Percy’s prejudices, even while exposing the problems with Frank’s postsouthern world-as-text.

### III

#### *Frank in Michigan*

In contrast to Binx Bolling’s terror upon disembarking in Chicago, Frank Bascombe is brimming with anticipation upon arriving in Detroit. Indeed, Frank seems to experience much the same “wonder” that Carrie Meeber felt a century earlier when first responding to the sign-systems of Chicago. However, Frank is more literate in the consumer semiotics of urban space than Dreiser’s heroine: “The air in Detroit Metro is bright crackly factory air. New cars revolve glitteringly down every concourse. Paul Anka sings tonight at Cobo Hall, a flashing billboard tell us” (119).<sup>19</sup>

Hobson has rightly noted that Frank celebrates “the much maligned Midwest, the target of much of Walker Percy’s satire.” Indeed, Ford’s

postsouthern response to Percy perhaps reaches its peak when Frank advocates neither (in John Egerton's terms) "the Americanization of Dixie," nor "the Southernization of America," but the Midwesternisation of America:

I have read that with enough time American civilization will make the midwest of any place, New York included. And from here that seems not at all bad. Here is a great place be in love; to get a land-grant education; to own a mortgage [...] friendly Negroes and Polacks pull their pants legs up, sit side by side, feeling the cool Canadian breeze off the lake. So much that is explicable in American life is made in Detroit. (121)<sup>20</sup>

Much as Frank celebrates "Anyplace" where Binx scorned "Nowhere," so this ode to Detroit contrasts with Binx's vision of another major Midwestern metropolis. In Chicago, Binx saw only "heavy and squarish" buildings and non-Southern women. In Detroit, Frank sees a racially harmonious, bourgeois consumer utopia: a city that is compatible with New Jersey's own "American" landscape. Frank can envision becoming a consumer in Detroit: "buy[ing] a new car every year right at the factory door. Nothing would suit me better in middle life than to set up in a little cedar-shake builder's-design in Royal Oak or Dearborn" (121). Whereas Binx derides Harold Graebner's life in Wilmette, Frank has no such Southern prejudice toward consumer life in the Midwestern suburbs. On the contrary, Frank fondly imagines a college friend, Eddy Loukinen, living "down in Royal Oak with his own construction firm. Possibly an insulated window frame outlet in the UP--trading cars every year, checking his market shares" (157).<sup>21</sup>

However, one must look more closely at this postsouthern, post-Percyan sense of place. For in this vision of Eddy, we encounter a tendency in Frank that

becomes increasingly apparent in the novel. If the literalist no longer “risk[s] speculating” about the “large world,” he does indulge in flights of fancy about the possible lives of friends, acquaintances, and even himself. One might say that Frank’s fantastical speculations about Eddy seem to follow the “fictional” logic of finance-capitalist land speculation itself. For much as this “fond wonder” upon Eddy’s life and suburban sense of place has no referential meaning beyond Frank’s world-as-text, the kind of market speculation in which (Frank *imagines* that) Eddy indulges is a wondrous fiction. Like “land value” itself, speculation in “market shares” is made up of “fictitious capital,” which David Harvey defines as “a flow of money capital not backed by any commodity transaction” or productive labour. The reader is alerted to this disjunction between abstract market speculation and physical labour--and also, perhaps, to the material-geographical disjunction between Royal Oak and Wall Street--by Frank’s (again “fictional”) reference to Eddy’s manual work.<sup>22</sup>

We have further reason to wonder about Frank’s world-as-text when the sportswriter (really) visits Walled Lake, a small commuter town “beyond the perimeter of true Detroit suburbia” (157). Frank is here to interview ex-football star Herb Wallagher. However, in the figure of Herb, Frank encounters a case of angst “in the old mossy existential sense” (151) that severely contravenes his own suburban (financial and textual) speculations. The sportswriter had presumed that athletes are usually “fairly certain about the world and are ready to comment on it.” However, Herb expresses an anxiety-ridden empathy with Ulysses Grant’s declaration of alienated linguistic selfhood: “I think I am a verb instead of a personal pronoun. A verb signifies to be; to do; to suffer. I signify all three” (163). From here on, Frank’s sportswriterly text(s) cannot contain Herb’s

alienation. Herb's wor(l)ds both interpolate Frank's autobiographical narrative ("*The Sportswriter*"), and complicate the cosy magazine feature Frank is supposed to write. As Frank later admits, Herb "is no easy nut to crack, since he's obviously as alienated as Camus [...] Some life does not give in to a sportswriter's point of view" (214-215).

Nick Hornby has noted that it is Frank who "occasionally appears as alienated and as dislocated as the hero of Camus' *L'Étranger*." I would add that Frank's existential and narrative identity is inseparable from his consumer's self-placement in an intensely capitalist world. Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) may be helpful here. Having criticised vulgar existentialism, the "pure contemplation of the isolated individual" ("excremental philosophy," in Henri Lefebvre's memorable definition), Soja emphasises the "existential spatiality of being." Extrapolating from Heidegger, Soja argues that "being-in-the-world" is always mediated through a nexus of social, economic and spatial factors. As I have tried to show, Frank's own being-in-the-world is bound up with an uncritical celebration of, and immersion in, the kind of postmodern capitalist geographies that Soja discusses. Frank has displaced his existential anxiety about the "large world" on to the consumer-friendly language-landscapes of New Jersey and Detroit. As such, we should not be surprised that once Herb's fractured sense of *self* begins to trouble Frank--"I am sorry to hear Herb referring to his life in the past tense. It is not an optimistic sign" (160)--the sportswriter's complacent sense of *place* is also destabilised. His "spatialized ontology" in turmoil, Frank suddenly revises his way of seeing and writing Walled Lake as well: "It is not a particularly nice place, a shabby summer community of unattractive bungalows. Not the neighborhood I'd expected for an ex-all-pro" (161).<sup>23</sup>

Frank even begins to connect his alienation with land speculation and real estate development. As the interview goes from bad to worse, Frank characteristically projects outward on to place itself. However, unlike Pheasant Run & Meadow in New Jersey, where Frank “consumed” a language-landscape that signified successful capitalist speculation, Walled Lake offers no consolation. On the contrary: “A hundred years ago, this country would’ve been wooded and the lake splendid and beautiful. A perfect place for a picnic. But now it has all been ruined by houses and cars” (161). Leaving Walled Lake (and fleeing Herb) in Mr Smallwood’s taxi, Frank sees the charred remnants of the local casino, where he once gambled during his college days. Walled Lake Casino is a site that, to paraphrase John Carlos Rowe, once referred to and epitomised a speculative economy. However, in its present dilapidation, the site symbolises the contingency of (land) speculation, thus undermining further Frank’s self-assurance: “No one, apparently, has thought to find a new use for the land. My past in decomposition and trivial disarray” (171). Frank’s existential investment in the pleasure of a capitalist world-as-text is exposed by the irruption of *real* (sub)urban decay into his life and narrative.<sup>24</sup>

Upon returning to Detroit, the alienation of Frank’s existential-spatial being from his “American” language-landscape proceeds apace. Though Frank’s travelling companion, Vicki Arcenault, is waiting for him, he cannot avert “the sad old familiarity from the dreamy days after Ralph died [...] lost in strangersville with a girl I don’t know well enough” (174). Attempting to avert this existential-spatial dislocation, and to redeem Detroit as “*the* right place” (176), Frank and Vicki venture into the city. Folks has observed that, for Frank, “Detroit itself, with its unpredictable weather, is capable of inspiring hope as well as loss.” This



is true, as far as it goes, and one might add that, in his hopeful image of Detroit, Frank continues to reject and oppose Binx's "Southern" horror of the Midwestern metropolis. Nevertheless, as at Walled Lake, the socio-spatial reality of Detroit soon destroys Frank's hope. More than that, the real Detroit destroys Frank's earlier image of the city as an utopian, all-American melting pot. Frank and Vicki attempt to find a steakhouse on Larned but, as Frank admits, "when we had gone as far as Woodward, everyone we saw had become black and vaguely menacing, the taxis and police all unexplainably disappeared" (180). Due to urban-industrial decay and racial segregation--inextricably related to the development of those "white-flight areas" (157) advancing toward and beyond Walled Lake that Frank earlier observed--Woodward no longer offers even the seedy carnivalesque of Frank's college days (180-181). Replacing Frank's earlier imagined community of blacks and Polacks, this racialised vision of Detroit comes closer to Binx or Newel's image of Chicago.<sup>25</sup>

Eventually, the dispirited couple retreat to their hotel room. Matthew Guinn observes perceptively that the room conforms to what architect Robert Venturi terms "commercial vernacular," "the characteristically postmodern approach of blending the motifs of high culture with the less lofty aim of commercial gain." Guinn also notes that the eleventh floor room affords Frank a view of Renaissance Center, a "city-within-a-city" designed by John Portman, whose work Fredric Jameson has interpreted as the apotheosis of "postmodern hyperspace."<sup>26</sup> One might expand upon Guinn's useful points on a couple of counts. Firstly, as Sharon Zukin notes in *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (1991), Renaissance Center was bankrolled by the Ford Corporation as part of a civic-corporate attempt to reverse Detroit's urban-industrial decay.<sup>27</sup> Thus,

even while Frank focuses his “fisheye view” upon “gaunt Ren-Cen” (126), the economic logic of this “postmodern hyperspace” yet alludes to downtown Detroit’s wider “postindustrial” decline. The economic base of Renaissance Center intones the more pervasive urban blight. Secondly, Renaissance Center is not simply a “city within a city,” as Guinn claims: to quote Jameson, it exists in “disjunction from the surrounding city.” This may appear paradoxical—that a building can both allude to, and separate from, the surrounding city. But like Portman’s Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles, Renaissance Center can be seen as “a total space, a complete world” that “does not wish to be a part of the city but rather its equivalent and replacement or substitute.”<sup>28</sup> Frank perhaps catches something of the Center’s disjunction from its built environment with the adjective “gaunt.” What Charles Rutheiser has written of a third “Portman-teau,” Peachtree Center in Atlanta, can also be applied to Renaissance Center: as an “analogous city,” it is “uncontaminated by the ‘congestion’ and ‘danger’ of the streets.”<sup>29</sup> When Frank turns his consumer’s gaze upon “Ren-Cen,” he sees the reflection—and the capitalist spatial logic—of his own desire to escape the “menacing” poverty and segregation of that older urban space around Larned.

Having returned to the hotel room, Vicki and Frank abruptly decide to catch the quickest flight back to New Jersey. Even then, Frank does not indict directly either Walled Lake or Detroit as a Northern Nowhere. It is Vicki who implicitly includes Detroit alongside Dallas, her hometown, in a casually dystopian vision of a placeless postsouthern America (180). Nonetheless, Frank’s expedition to Detroit has ended almost as abruptly as Binx’s excursion to Chicago. Ultimately, much as Binx’s residual “Southern” sense of place was revealed during his trip to Illinois, so the problem with Frank’s *postsouthern*

spatial ontology--his financial, existential and textual investment in an idealised "American" language-landscape--has been exposed in Michigan. This should not be surprising if we consider that, in the 1980s, and contrary to Frank's fantasy of a multiracial utopia where cars go straight from the factory door to the suburban consumer, Detroit was devastated by downtown disinvestment and the precipitous decline of the automobile and steel industries. The harsh realities of capitalist geography--uneven development and postindustrial decay--have burst through the lacunae in Frank's world-as-text.<sup>30</sup>

*Frank in New Jersey again*

His literalist's vision of Detroit having failed, Frank subsequently attempts to reinforce his idealised image of New Jersey. He begins to do so even on the plane back from Detroit: it is at this point that Frank looks down upon the Turnpike and declares it "beautiful." However, Frank's world-as-text further unravels when he returns to ground in Haddam. No sooner has Frank literally distanced himself and his worldview from Herb Wallagher than "[i]n my house stands Walter Luckert" (186). Walter is a fellow member of Haddam's Divorced Men's Club who has come to Frank for advice after a homosexual encounter with a fellow Wall Street monies analyst. During and after this unwanted visit, Frank tries hard to *avoid* becoming embroiled in Walter's emotional travails. This evasion is of a piece with Frank's continued refusal of serious, critical engagement with the "large world." However, Frank's complacency is violently disrupted when, while he is spending Easter Sunday at the Arcevault family home in Barnegat Pines, X rings with news of Walter's suicide. This shock is soon followed by Vicki violently ending their relationship.<sup>31</sup>

The salient point for my purposes is that, with this further irruption of personal trauma into Frank's worldview, his socio-spatial ontology also becomes more strained. During the car ride to Barnegat Pines, New Jersey had lived up to its earlier definition as a legible "American" landscape. Indeed, according to Frank, New Jersey appears not only as "Anyplace" but also as Everyplace, a generic industrial-commercial geography that can even benignly simulate the South itself:

[Vicki's] directions route me past the most ordinary but satisfying New Jersey vistas, those parts that remind you of the other places you've been in your life [...] Much of what I pass, of course, looks precisely like everyplace else *in* the state [...] Clean industry abounds. Valve plants. A Congoleum factory. U-Haul sheds. A sand and gravel pit close by a glass works. An Airedale kennel. The Quaker Home for Confused Friends. A mall with a nautical theme. Several signs that say HERE! Suddenly it is a high pale sky and a feeling like Florida, but a mile farther on, it is the Mississippi Delta--civilized life flattened below high power lines, the earth laid out in great vegetative tracts where Negroes fish from low bridges [...] (245)

However, on the return journey to Haddam, *after* hearing of Walter's suicide and experiencing the end of his relationship, the satisfactions of this "clean" (post)industrial panorama fail Frank completely. Driving along the Parkway, "there is no consoling landscape" on to which Frank can displace his emotional anxiety. Even the everyday capitalist signs once taken for wonders--"[a]n occasional Pontiac dealer's sign or a tennis bubble"--now seem "far too meager and abstracted" (304).

Typically, Frank attempts to redeem “mystery” when, “halfway through the town of Adelphia, New Jersey, on Business 524” (305), standing opposite the Ground Zero Burg burger bar, he puts in a call to Selma Jassim, an ex-girlfriend. However, Selma provides no solace, and Frank sustains minor injuries when, surreally, his phone booth is ram-raided by a youth in a car. Dupuy has perceptively observed that, at this point, Ground Zero Burg appears as “an appropriate objective correlative for his [Frank’s] state of mind.”<sup>32</sup> However, one can go further and argue that, as at Walled Lake, there is a more deep-seated equivalence between Frank’s disturbed existential being and the ailing capitalist geography itself. Frank’s optimism is briefly reignited by the kindness of Debra Spanelis, the carhop. Tellingly, he utilises Debra’s kindness to dissociate his *existential* depression from Adelphia’s *economic* depression:

Who would’ve thought a root-beer float could restore both faith and health, or that I would find it in as half-caste a town as this, a place wizened to a few car lots, an adult book store, a shut-down drive-in movie up the road--remnants of a boom that never boomed. From this emerges a Samaritan. A Debra. (313)

Frank here shows an unusual awareness of capitalist uneven development (albeit only implicitly, and expressed in a puzzling racial metaphor that perhaps refers insidiously to Debra’s relationship with the African-American ram-raider). However, the socio-spatial reality of Debra’s life cannot be reconciled with his literalist’s optimism. Folks has posited that “[t]here is an element of solidarity in Frank’s unusual degree of sympathy with subaltern figures--his willingness to cross social boundaries, to empathize with the excluded, and to submit the class assumptions of his suburban community to critical examination.” Frank’s

“sympathy with subaltern figures” seems apparent when Debra says that she wants to work in Yellowstone Park, reminding Frank that he had the same fantasy after his divorce. However, Debra’s hopes are hamstrung by the fact that she has a baby. Frank is forced to recognise that their socio-spatial realities, their language-landscapes, are ultimately irreconcilable: “I might as well have been speaking French from the planet Pluto” (315). Unlike Debra, Frank can drive-in and drive on back to Haddam. It is telling that, as Frank departs, he now describes Adelphia as “a bleak-looking place,” and remarks that he “can’t help thinking of Herb Wallagher’s dream of death and hatred” (316). For as at Walled Lake, Frank’s latest attempt to lose himself in a capitalist world-as-text again comes up against the reality of urban decay and social exclusion.<sup>33</sup>

Reentering Haddam, Frank still hopes to redeem “a pastoral kind of longing” (318) from the suburbs. However, as Dupuy notes, Frank “must confront the empty fact of Walter’s death.” This grim fact impinges upon Frank’s previously idealised cognitive map of Haddam. Where Frank could have been French or Plutonian to Debra, now he is the alien in Haddam: “I see again it can be a sad town, a silent, nothing-happening, keep-to-yourself Sunday town [...] It is unexpectedly a foreign place, as strange as Moline or Oslo” (320). Beginning to *reread* his world-as-text, Frank sees that even mortality (something he should know all about, given Ralph’s demise) is denied by the suburbs. Death becomes “a misreading, a wrong rumor to be forgotten” (325).<sup>34</sup>

Yet once again Frank tries to seek some solace by “driv[ing], an invisible man” through Haddam, a place that he (still) regards as “a first-class place for invisibility” (345-346). Frank heads for Haddam railway station, where he seeks a typically limited human connection: “It is not bad to sit in some placeless dark

and watch commuters step off into splashy car lights, striding toward the promise of bounteous hugs" (347). Once again, we note that Frank's open-minded attitude to a semi-public "nonplace" contrasts with Binx's attitude upon arriving at Chicago railway station: "I will say it again, perhaps for the last time: there is mystery anywhere, even in a vulgar, urine-scented, suburban depot such as this" (348). However, when he thinks he sees Walter's sister arriving, and heading his way, Frank is panicked into boarding the train to New York. Now dismissing Haddam as one of many "little crypto-homey Jersey bur3s" (353), Frank desperately recasts his world-as-text to encompass the city that he usually dismisses as "Gotham." He even tries to incorporate New York into his earlier theory of the Midwesternisation of America (358).

Eventually, Frank does find some succour in New York, in the form of intern Catherine O'Flaherty. Dupuy concludes his reading of *The Sportswriter* with Frank in "the city of flux [...] not disappointed," refusing (unlike Walter) to relent to death. Against Dupuy, I would argue that, having been confronted by the existential and socio-economic suffering of others, Frank's own relenting, literalist identity and worldview have been seriously, even terminally damaged. Moreover, it is important to note that *The Sportswriter* ends not in New York, but in Florida. As such, any reading of Frank's "sense of place"--both his own spatialised ontology and his textual cartography--must consider the complexities of this final postsouthern turn.<sup>35</sup>

## V

*Frank in Florida*

The shift to Florida enables Ford to provide a final flourish to *The Sportswriter's* postsouthern parody of place. As we saw in Chapter 3, in the Epilogue to *The Moviegoer*, Binx Bolling elliptically and abruptly announces his reentry to a relatively traditional Southern locus: New Orleans' Garden District. Such an option is not open to Frank Bascombe at "The End" of *The Sportswriter*. We know by now that Frank has no Compson-like family waiting for him in Mississippi. Instead, rather more modestly, Frank finds in Florida "some cousins of my father's who wrote me in Gotham through Irv Ornstein (my mother's stepson)" (376). Hobson has correctly observed that Frank's discovery of these distant relatives "parodies the idea of southern family" and occurs in "a setting not given to such discoveries in most southern novels." Echoing the earlier evocation of his own mother and father's "ordinary, modern existence" in postwar Mississippi, Frank declares the "Florida Bascombes" to be "a grand family of a modern sort." Empress Bascombe certainly does not share Aunt Emily's Southern stoicism, and Buster and Empress' "big yellow stucco bungalow outside Nokomis" is decidedly different from the Sutpen or even the Cutrer mansion. Empress does, though, share the Bolling-Cutrer family's fascination with land speculation. Frank sketches her as "a pixyish little right-winger" who "sells a little real estate on the side (though she is not as bad as those people often seem)" (376).<sup>36</sup>

In contrast to Sam Newel, Frank embraces this extended family precisely because they do *not* represent "the burden of Southern history," or the stale stuff of "Southern literature":



And truthfully, when I drive back up Highway 24 just as the light is falling beyond my condo, behind its wide avenue of date palms and lampposts, I am usually (if only momentarily) glad to have a past, even an imputed and remote one. There is something to that. It is not a burden, though I've always thought of it as one. I cannot say that we all need a past in full literary fashion, or that one is much useful in the end. But a small one doesn't hurt, especially if you're already in a life of your own choosing.

(377)

Hobson quotes this particular passage as evidence that, finally, "Frank is more southern than he professes"--apparently because Frank finally decides "that to have an ancestral history [...] even if an unfamiliar one, is not such a bad thing after all." I will offer a more substantial critique of Hobson's recovery of *The Sportswriter* as "a southern novel in a southern tradition" at the end of Chapter 6. For now, I will say that it is a fallacy to see *The Sportswriter* as "southern." To paraphrase Kreyling, one cannot fold the new (postsouthern parody) into the established (southern). By sending Frank to Florida, Ford furthers the postsouthern parody that he initiated in *A Piece of My Heart* and extended earlier in *The Sportswriter*. For all that Florida is nominally in the South, Frank finds no community historically rooted in place. In fact, Florida seems more like Frank's postsouthern, Midwesternised America than Mississippi, or even Gentilly. Frank observes that "[p]eople in Florida, I've discovered, are here to get away from things, to seek no end of life [...] Many people are from Michigan [...] It is not like New Jersey, but it is not bad" (373). Indeed, in what might be seen as another sly salvo against Percy's image of Michigan (and the Midwest generally) as a "non-place," Ford has Frank define himself not as a native "Southerner" but as

“a good Michigander, get[ting] the sun on my face while somewhere nearby I hear the hiss and pop of ball on glove leather. That may be a sportswriter’s dream life” (376).<sup>37</sup>

However, in these final pages we also sense the same *problems* with Frank’s postsouthern sense of place. We witness yet another example of Frank’s complacent Self-Placement in the “large world,” and his conspicuous consumption of, and narrative “speculation” in, places themselves: after New Jersey, Detroit and New York comes Florida. To be fair, “The End” of *The Sportswriter* opens with the promising sense that Frank might just revise his spatial ontology. He admits “Walter’s death, I suppose you could say, has had the effect on me that death means to have; of reminding me of my responsibility to a somewhat larger world.” Though, unsurprisingly, Frank avoids Walter’s funeral in Coshocton, Ohio--“I could not feel that I had a place there” (372)--it is at Walter’s behest that he arrives in Florida. In a suicide note addressed to Frank, Walter claims he has a secret daughter living in Florida; after “a good bit of sleuthing,” Frank concludes that no such a daughter ever existed. Yet the “goose chase” appears initially to have given Frank the impetus to embark upon a more serious, even Binx-like “search” of his own “larger world.” It is all the more notable, then, that Frank’s subsequent comments--including his identification with Michiganders--lead us to suspect that he is simply inventing Florida as one more site for his “sportswriter’s dream life,” one more language-landscape in his world-as-text. As Frank claims in familiar fashion, “[c]oming to the bottom of the country provokes a nice sensation, a tropical certainty that something will happen to you here. The whole place seems alive with modest hopes” (373).

At the close of *The Sportswriter*, Frank remains in Florida, musing: "Will I ever live in Haddam, New Jersey again? I haven't the slightest idea" (380). However, in 1995, Richard Ford published a sequel, *Independence Day*, in which Frank returns to Haddam and undertakes a search for "responsibility" in the "larger world." In *Independence Day*, Frank becomes a real estate agent with a philosophy of place as capitalist property that sets him apart not only from Empress Bascombe, but also from that earlier land speculator, Binx Bolling. This is the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### New Jersey Real Estate and the Postsouthern Sense of Place: Richard Ford's *Independence Day*

Some way into his second autobiographical narrative, Frank Bascombe acknowledges that “[i]t might be of some interest to say how I came to be a Residential Specialist, distant as it is from my prior vocations of failed short-story writer and sports journalist.”<sup>1</sup> He recounts how “[f]ive years ago, at the end of a bad season” (91), he moved to Florida and thereafter to France. It appears that the “foreign but thrilling *exterior* landscape” (92) of France followed New Jersey, Detroit, New York and Florida as—to cite Walker Percy’s terms again—one more place feeding Frank’s spatial “species of consumption.” However, Frank does now (it is 1988) acknowledge that his move to Florida was part of a “major crisis” (91). Moreover, it soon becomes apparent that, since departing France, Frank has been striving seriously to solve his Percyan “predicament of placement vis-à-vis the world.” He has embarked upon an existential search for his own sense of place by returning to “Haddam itself, which felt at that celestial moment like my spiritual residence more than any place I’d ever been, inasmuch as it *was* the place I instinctively and in a heat charged back to.”<sup>2</sup>

Importantly, though, Frank’s New Jersey homecoming is not simply an attempt to achieve self-placement by recouring to a familiar, mystified (“celestial,” “spiritual”) faith in the material geography of “Haddam itself.” Frank is also determined to reach out to other people: to put into practice that “responsibility to a somewhat larger world” he began to feel in Florida.<sup>3</sup> As he

puts it, he returned to Haddam “with a new feeling of great purpose and a fury to suddenly *do* something serious for my own good and possibly even others” (93). Since *The Sportswriter*, Frank has moved beyond self-effacing immersion in, and consumption of, capitalist geographies; but he has also avoided what Edward Soja calls vulgar existentialism--the “pure contemplation of the isolated individual.” Instead, he has begun to reconsider his predicament in terms of social relations: “everything I might do had to be calculated against the weight of the practical and according to the standard considerations of: Would it work? and, What good would it do for me or anybody?” (94).<sup>4</sup>

Jeffrey Folks has succinctly summarised this shift in Frank’s philosophy since *The Sportswriter*. Folks notes that the sequel’s narrative “is considerably less focused on the inner self” because Frank becomes “more entangled in a web of social responsibilities” as he moves “from solitude back to society.” I want to make four further points that will form the basis of my argument in this chapter. Firstly, Frank’s new job as a Residential Specialist is absolutely crucial to his revised philosophy. It allows Frank to move “from solitude back to society,” and provides him with the opportunity to “*do* something serious for my own good and possibly even others.” Secondly, Frank abandons his earlier land and literary speculations in and upon postmodern, capitalist geographies. As his job helps him to understand that (to cite Michel de Certeau’s dialectic) “space is existential” and “existence is spatial,” Frank enacts Soja’s “spatialized ontology.” This involves “the active emplacement and situation of being-in-the-world”--specifically, Frank’s own “larger world” in and beyond Haddam. Thirdly, working with real estate allows Frank to see how capitalist property relations impact upon the economic *and* existential production of (a sense of) place. Fourthly, having

worked through these socio-spatial realities, Frank formulates his own theory of independence as a socio-spatial practice that enables one's (albeit contingent) self-placement in postsouthern America.<sup>5</sup>

## I

### *Frank's new philosophy of place*

Early in *Independence Day*, we encounter the kind of sly but clearly disparaging reference to the South that Frank frequently made in *The Sportswriter*. Evidently, Frank (still) favours New Jersey's sense of place over Mississippi's. He asserts that: "Of course, having come first to life in a true *place*, and one as monotonously, lankly *itself* as the Mississippi Gulf Coast, I couldn't be truly surprised that a simple *setting* such as Haddam--willing to be so little itself--would seem, on second look, a great relief and damned easy to cozy up to" (93). This familiar scepticism towards the South introduces (albeit only implicitly at this point) a central tenet of Frank's new philosophy of place. This is that one should not fetishise the material locus in "*itself*," as if physical geography has some intrinsic power or meaning independent of human action. Frank's view that Mississippi's celebrated, supposedly "natural" sense of place simply subsumes the identity of the native individual echoes Julius Rowan Raper's theory that "in the South, the people (*ethnos*) and the place (*edon*) tend to become one." As Raper argues, this leads to a problematic situation in which the "sense of place takes on a role better played by a sense of self."<sup>6</sup>

Frank's own theory of the self's relation to "place" and "community" in postsouthern society becomes more explicit when he details his move from

sportswriting to real(i)ty. Five years on, Frank's wife Ann (X is named this time round) has remarried and moved, with their two children, to Connecticut. Together with Frank's occupation of Ann's own "postdivorce" (151) house, this move has produced "the geography of divorce" (103). More importantly though, it is during the sale of the former family home on Hoving Road that the acting agent, Rolly Mounger, offers Frank the chance to become a Residential Specialist. Ironically, it is precisely Frank's prior detachment from *any* form of social relations in Haddam that informs Rolly's belief that the ex-sportswriter will make an ideal realtor. As Frank admits, "I didn't seem to have a lot of attachments in the community, a factor that made selling houses one hell of a lot easier" (109). Once Frank has accepted the job offer, Rolly offers his new colleague the platitudinous advice that: "This is realty. *Reality's* something else." However, unlike the complacent Rolly--and pace the Southern Agrarians, with their foundational opposition between authentic, concrete real property and capitalistic, abstract real estate--Frank becomes acutely aware that realty *is* the socio-economic reality underlying Haddam's sense of place. Hence the aside, "my personal take on the job probably wouldn't be just like Rolly's" (115).

In *The Sportswriter*, we learned that Haddam is an affluent, suburban small town populated largely by wealthy, white-collar professionals. In the opening lines of *Independence Day*, the socio-economic privilege prevalent throughout Haddam appears nigh-on "natural": "In Haddam, summer floats over tree-softened streets like a sweet lotion balm from a careless, languorous god, and the world falls in tune with its own mysterious anthems." From the first paragraph, it could be construed that the town is an inherently well-ordered, even "organic" community. Frank provides a narrative panorama that runs from the men in "the Negro trace"

who “sit on stoops, pants legs rolled above their sock tops, sipping coffee in the growing easeful heat,” to the varsity band practising for Haddam’s Independence Day parade. However, such images remind one of Frank’s failed textual invention of Detroit as a multiracial utopia, a “place of wintry snuggle-up” populated by happy-go-lucky “Negroes and Polacks.” Indeed, as then, so now the realities of race and class begin to leak into Frank’s narrative. When Frank refers to how “[w]e’re repaving this summer [...] using our proud new tax dollars,” his use of the personal and possessive pronouns inadvertently points up a socio-economic gap between the capital and property owned by Haddam’s residents, and the hired labour of “the Cape Verdeans and wily Hondurans from poorer towns north of here” (3).<sup>7</sup>

However, whereas Frank’s first narrative laboured to maintain the illusion of Haddam’s “pastoral longing,” now Frank early and explicitly acknowledges that Haddam is *not* simply some self-contained paradise: “all is not exactly kosher here.” Employing another meteorological metaphor, Frank explains that Haddam’s “second nature”<sup>8</sup> of socio-economic privilege is in unexpected and pervasive crisis: “falling property values now ride through the trees like an odorless, colorless mist settling through the still air where all breathe it in, all sense it” (4). However metaphorically mist-ified, Frank here begins to show that “sense” of place in Haddam is subject to market forces. As Frank subsequently observes, “it must mean *something* to a town, to the local *esprit*, for its values on the open market to fall (Why else would real estate prices be an index to the national well-being?)” (5). Frank thus suggests the extent to which property values play a role in socio-spatial relations--and not just in Haddam, but across the United States.



Frank's current clients, Phyllis and Joe Markham, have discovered the extent to which Haddam's "local *esprit*" is mediated by "real estate prices." Having lived in Vermont since the early 1970s, the Markhams are comically ignorant of how much their ideal house with "mysterious-wondrous home possibilities" (39) would actually cost. The population of Haddam may have "ballooned from twelve to twenty thousand" during the early 1980s, but in terms of market value and social status, the newer properties built during the boom are regarded as inferior to Haddam's coveted older houses. While the original eighteenth-century settlement has been tellingly "rechristened 'Haddam the Pleasant' by the village council" (23), local "realty lingo" (132) signifies the newer developments as "the Haddam-area."

Inevitably, the Markhams are unable to afford a house in "Haddam the Pleasant." Among the more affordable properties Frank shows them is Mallards Landing, yet even the Residential Specialist himself admits that this new development "looks like a movie façade where a fictionalized American family would someday pay the fictionalized mortgage" (83). It is notable that he does *not* show them Pheasant Meadow. In *The Sportswriter*, it was here that, while uncritically "relenting" to the "readable" language-landscape, Frank incorporated the developers' advertising slogan--"*An Attractive Retirement Waits Just Ahead*"--into his own world-as-text.<sup>9</sup> However, by 1988, Pheasant Meadow has succumbed to the economic downturn, "not old but already gone visibly to seed"--"dilapidated sign" and all (141). Even more gloomily, Frank's fellow realtor and former lover, Clair Devane, was murdered here. As in *The Sportswriter*, Frank recapitulates the "realty lingo" of Pheasant Meadow in his narrative. This time, however, Frank brings a critical sense of irony to the linguistic logic of late capitalism. In the

process, he not only critiques the uneven geographical development within Haddam, but also looks beyond national borders to indict the *laissez-faire* economics of Reagan's America:

The best all-around Americans, in my view, are Canadians. I, in fact, should think of moving there, since it has almost all of the good qualities of the states and almost none of the bad, plus cradle-to-grave health care and a fraction of the murders we generate. An attractive retirement waits just beyond the forty-ninth parallel (191).

At one point, an exasperated Frank takes the Markhams to see a house in Penns Neck. This house presents a chronotopic illusion of precapitalist, agricultural real property that appeals to the Vermont-based couple—it has the “out-of-place look of having been the ‘original farmhouse’ when all this was nothing but cow pastures and farmland [...] and real estate meant zip” (60). But as Frank's quotation marks indicate, the building's rustic pseudo-authenticity is precisely its selling-point in a district that “realty lingo” has reinvented as part of “the Haddam-area.” Joe bemoans the lack of a personal, property-owning (as Robert Penn Warren once put it) “relation of man to place” in the Penns Neck “area,” and the United States generally: “I don't want to live in an area [...] Nobody ever said the Vermont area [...] They just said the places” (59).<sup>10</sup>

Frank endures a trying time as agent to the insufferable Markhams. At one point, he scathingly criticises the Markhams' residual faith in “Vermont's spiritual mandate,” which “is that you don't look at *yourself*, but spend years gazing at everything *else* as penetratingly as possible in the conviction that everything out there more or less stands for you” (89). In his essay “Still Rebels, Still Yankees” (1938), Donald Davidson celebrated Vermont's “genius of place,” arguing that it

transformed the natives into “the image of what they contemplated [...] the landscape.” For Davidson, this fusion of people and (agrarian) place was to be celebrated; despite the regional differences, rural Vermont complemented Georgia’s own “genius of place.” But for Frank, by “contemplating the landscape” of Vermont, the Markhams have only *elided* their own existential being. Instead of making themselves over into the “image” of the “*exterior* landscape,” the Markhams have turned Vermont into a fetishised *substitute* for their selves. Ironically, the Markhams’ (Davidsonian) bad faith in Vermont’s “spiritual mandate” vividly repeats that failing Raper identifies in the South. *Edos* subjugates *ethnos*, the fetishised “sense of place takes on a role better played by a sense of self.”<sup>11</sup>

Frank sees beyond his clients’ bad faith and numerous neuroses to identify the economics of place as the root of the couple’s frustrations. Frank observes that the Markhams “have failed to intuit the one gnostic truth of real estate (a truth impossible to reveal without seeming dishonest and cynical): that people never find or buy the house they say they want.” Clarifying his own mystical rhetoric, Frank identifies the “gnostic truth of real estate” as the material reality of a “market economy.” This market economy of place “is not even remotely premised on anybody getting what he wants. The premise is that you’re presented with what you might’ve thought you didn’t want, but what’s available, whereupon you give in and start finding ways to feel good about it and yourself” (41). Frank reiterates this realtor’s understanding of the spatial (il)logic of capitalism, and its impact upon the “relation of man to place,” when it becomes clear that Joe wants a house that will provide “perfect sanction, a sign some community recognizes him.” Frank rather brutally observes that “the only way communities ever

recognize anything [is]: financially (tactfully expressed as a matter of compatibility)” (51-52). Frank here echoes the point made by sociologist Robert Bellah and his colleagues in *Habits of the Heart*: that so-called “communities” are often “lifestyle enclaves” where people live because “the housing prices there happen to fit their budgets.”<sup>12</sup>

Frank’s sceptical philosophy of place really comes to the fore during a trip to his girlfriend Sally Caldwell’s house in South Mantoloking. Suddenly, Frank is overcome by a need to feel nostalgic for this place he hardly knows. However, he recovers by recalling “a patent lesson of the realty profession, to cease sanctifying places--houses, beaches, hometowns.” Frank insists that: “We may feel they [places] *ought* to, *should* confer something--sanction, again [...] But they don’t [...] as the Markhams found out in Vermont and now New Jersey” (151-152). In Southern letters’ seminal definition of “sense of place,” Eudora Welty famously revered Mississippi River Country for “a sense of place as powerful as if it were visible and walking and could touch me.” Even Walker Percy’s cynical, suburban property speculator Binx Bolling could still invoke a metaphysical “thronging spirit-presence of [...] place” at the derelict site of his father’s duck club in rural Louisiana. By contrast, Frank Bascombe insists that “[p]lace means nothing” (152). In postsouthern America, both the Agrarians’ proprietary ideal *and* the Weltyan “sense of place,” with its debt to the pathetic fallacy of romantic pantheism, have been superseded by the capitalist fetishization of place as a commodity. Hence, Frank refuses to attribute “mysterious-wondrous home possibilities” to mass-produced “Haddam-area” houses because, as geographer David Harvey suggests, to talk or “write of ‘the power of place,’ as if places [...] possess causal powers is to engage in the grossest of fetishisms.” Indeed, to

fetishise the “power” or “sense” of place is to risk reproducing the commodity logic (and the “realty lingo”) of late capitalism itself.<sup>13</sup>

Yet in a lengthy review of *Independence Day*, Barbara Ehrenreich claims that Frank’s life and text do just that. Ehrenreich argues that, for Frank, “physical structures are easier to deal with than their residents. Realty beats reality.” Apparently, Frank engages in what “[s]eems like a case of ordinary commodity-fetishism, in which dead objects loom larger than persons.” In similar terms, but with a postsouthern theoretical twist, Matthew Guinn claims that “real estate is an extension of Frank’s penchant for the commodified mystery he once found in catalogs.” I have already argued that Frank’s new job helps him to understand just how the market economy of realty *is* (or at least produces) contemporary socio-spatial reality. But this is not to say that Frank willingly *accepts* capital’s hegemonic role in the production of place. Frank’s negation (“Place means nothing”) negotiates a way *between* the pathetic fallacy and commodity fetishism, creating an opportunity to rework the theory and praxis of “place.” Pace Ehrenreich and Guinn, Frank focuses upon human, socio-spatial relations, rather than place in and of “itself.”<sup>14</sup>

More specifically, Frank’s role as the Markhams’ realtor allows him to put into practice the desire to “*do something serious*” for other people. He strives to help the couple avert “spatial dislocation” (90) and “a potentially calamitous careen down a slippery socio-emotio-economic slope” (44) by emphasising that it *is* possible to live a fulfilling everyday life *outside* a privileged site like “Haddam the Pleasant.” To cite spatial philosopher Michel de Certeau, Ford’s narrator insists that consumers can “reappropriate the space organized by the techniques of sociocultural production” (among which capitalist techniques de Certeau includes

“urban development”). In conversation with Phyllis, Frank emphasises human action, rather than Haddam in and of “itself”: “You *are* best off coming as close as you can and trying to bring life to a place, not just depending on the place to supply it for you” (76). It is true that Frank subsequently calls this “a form of strategizing pseudo-communication I’ve gotten used to in the realty business,” as opposed to the “[r]eal talk [...] you have with a loved one.” Such an aside does make one wonder to what extent Frank *is*, as Ehrenreich suggests, uncritically recapitulating the logic and lingo of commodity fetishism. But in fact, Frank is trying to make the Markhams understand the extent to which their (nigh-on neo-Agrarian) proprietary ideal comes up against the market economy of realty, which *is* the (linguistic and material) reality: “They can’t afford their ideal. And not buying what you can’t afford’s not a compromise; it’s reality speaking English. To get anywhere you have to learn to speak the same language back” (90). In his talk with Phyllis, Frank adumbrates a spatial ontology for everyday life amidst the capitalist reality of realty: a sense of self-placement that neither precludes one’s self, nor fetishises “place.”<sup>15</sup>

## II

### *Race, property and “community”: Wallace Hill*

Frank offers one more house to the beleaguered Markhams: one of his own rental properties in the black neighbourhood called Wallace Hill. Frank purchased the two houses upon returning from France with the feeling that he had “contributed as little to the commonweal as it was possible for a busy man to contribute without being plain evil,” especially having “lived in Haddam [for] fifteen years [and] ridden the prosperity curve through the roof” (25-26). For all

the civil goodwill informing Frank's investment in Wallace Hill, it also inevitably evokes the spectre of (Southern) white paternalism. There is also an intertextual irony: in *The Sportswriter*, Frank blithely stated that Wallace Hill's residents "own their own homes." Furthermore, Frank admits to his own financial self-interest: "I hadn't been in the realty business long and was happy to think about diversifying my assets and stashing money where it'd be hard to get at" (27). To this degree, Frank is himself a finance capitalist land speculator; he exhibits the "capitalistic interest in the commercial value of location" that Guinn describes. Or, as Frank himself puts it, he is "looking after Number One" (112).<sup>16</sup>

But Frank also wants to "do for others" (112): not only the Markhams, but also the black residents. He hopes his personal intervention in Wallace Hill will help prevent more predatory property speculators from drastically redeveloping the neighbourhood. Ostensibly, Wallace Hill seems like an African-American version of Donald Davidson's "stable community which is really a community, not a mere real estate development." As Frank notes, "[r]eliable, relatively prosperous middle-aged and older Negro families have lived here for decades" (24). However, for all Wallace Hill's *physical* "permanence"--i.e. "relatively stable configuration of matter and things," in David Harvey's definition--Bascombe notes that its "sovereign protectors" have never had a corresponding *social* "sense of belonging and permanence" (27). Having previously (in *The Sportswriter*) included Wallace Hill's "servant classes, who are mostly Negroes" in his imagined community of happy Haddamites, Frank now recognises the extent to which Haddam's historical geography has been defined by racial segregation. Wallace Hill's residents have always had a subordinate role in the town's social and labour relations. As Frank observes ruefully, the neighbourhood's current denizens "and

their relatives might've been here a hundred years and had never done anything but make us white late-arrivers feel welcome at their own expense" (28). Now, in 1988, black Haddamites' ability to achieve a "sense of belonging and permanence" is further imperiled by real estate developers eyeing Wallace Hill as a prime location within "Haddam the Pleasant" (24-25). Frank believes he can "at least help make two families feel at home" (28) by "providing affordable housing options" (27).<sup>17</sup>

As we have seen, Frank acknowledges that he will gain financially from investing in the "integrity" of Wallace Hill. That Frank refers to this as "reinvesting in my community" (27) recalls the tension in the opening paragraph's pronouns between capitalist property ownership and the socio-spatial realities of race and class. Perhaps most intriguing, though, is Frank's suggestion that he will not be alone in making a profit from Wallace Hill properties:

as in-town property becomes more valuable (they aren't making any more of it), all the families here will realize big profits and move away to Arizona or down South, where their ancestors were once property themselves, and the whole area will be gentrified by incoming whites and rich blacks, after which my small investment [...] will turn into a gold mine (25).

If we feel uneasy about Frank's personal ownership of two houses in a historically black neighbourhood, I would argue that the narrative here raises a larger dilemma: the extent to which Wallace Hill's black residents can really be said to constitute a "community" at all--especially a Davidsonian "stable community."

For in contrast to their ancestors, it appears that the black residents of Wallace Hill do not necessarily *seek* a "sense of belonging and permanence." In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau argues that "as local stabilities break down,"



people are "no longer fixed by a circumscribed community." Instead, they become "immigrants in a system," albeit one which is "too vast to be their own, too tightly woven for them to escape it." It appears that Wallace Hill's African-American residents are becoming mobile "immigrants" within this national "system" of capitalist space, the "larger world" stretching from New Jersey through the South to Arizona. Homeowning and renting become "spatial practices" through which (some) black consumers can manipulate the market economy of real estate to escape the traditional segregated geography, the "circumscribed community," of Wallace Hill. We thus arrive at a notable irony, and a contradiction of capitalism: whereas land speculation produces uneven development elsewhere in "the Haddam area," gentrification promises to reduce, even erase, the racial segregation of Wallace Hill.<sup>18</sup>

To suggest that there is no longer a "circumscribed" or "stable community" in Wallace Hill is not to say that there are no social relations between the residents. One might expect that the arrival of the Markhams would destroy the mooted "integrity" of this established black neighbourhood. After all, Frank originally planned to rent his properties to African-Americans. However, Frank is optimistic that the white couple will "join the PTA, give pottery and papermaking demonstrations at the block association mixers, become active in the ACLU or the Urban League" (416) and "find common ground regarding in-law problems with Negro neighbors" (423). He hopes that the Markhams can find "a sense of belonging," if not necessarily "permanence," through "the satisfactions of optional community involvement" (431). But in the end they, like their black neighbours, might also transform themselves into migrants within the capitalist geographies of postmodern America, able to "do in New Jersey exactly what they

did in Vermont--arrive and depart--only with happier results" (416). Eventually, Wallace Hill will be transformed from a "stable" or "circumscribed" (i.e., segregated) community, into a liminal, "optional community"--if we still want to call it a "community" at all.

To be sure, Frank's projection of the Markhams' future in and beyond Wallace Hill and elsewhere may seem romantic, an ominous echo of those dreamy "speculations" upon his own and others' possible alternative lives in *The Sportswriter*. This time, though, Frank's abstract musings are mediated by his realtor's understanding of the ways in which so-called consumers *can* practice their everyday lives within the market economy of place. Nonetheless, one might sensibly qualify that certain sectors of Wallace Hill's populace *cannot* escape the historical continuities of uneven development and social inequality. Even those with the ability to migrate, to practice what Frank calls "demographic shifting," are restricted by the fact that "there aren't that many places for a well-heeled black American to go that's better than where he or she already is" (25). Yet Frank's personal intervention in Wallace Hill becomes valuable precisely because not all its residents are "well-heeled" enough to become mobile manipulators of (the market)place. By renting the two Clio Street properties, Frank helps maintain an "established black neighborhood" (24) that is being transformed into merely one more locus of capitalist land speculation.

## III

*Capital, "compatibility" and the fallacy of continuous community: Ridgefield, Deep River and Cooperstown*

A substantial proportion of *Independence Day* is devoted to Frank's pre-holiday trip with his son Paul to Cooperstown. This extended setpiece can be seen as the formal and thematic equivalent of Frank's journey to Detroit in *The Sportswriter*, or Binx Bolling's trip to Chicago in *The Moviegoer*. However, whereas Frank wittlessly celebrated the postindustrial language-landscape of Detroit, the journey to Cooperstown furthers his understanding of the capitalist production of space in the "larger world." Most importantly, the trip reconfirms Frank's philosophy that, despite the supposed decline of community and place, social relations are the key to establishing one's own spatialised ontology within the capitalist geographies of postsouthern America.

On his way to collect Paul in Deep River, Frank exits the New Jersey Turnpike in order to avoid "miles and miles of backup on the Cross Bronx (myself dangled squeamishly above the teeming hellish urban no-man's land below)" (195). This route takes Frank through Ridgefield, Connecticut, a small town like "Haddam, New Jersey--only richer." Ridgefield, even more so than Haddam, is less a community than a lifestyle enclave defined by economic "compatibility." Frank notes wryly that "anyone living below the Cross Bronx would move here if he or she could pay the freight" (196). Trying to find overnight accommodation, Frank criticises the pervasive sense of exclusivity: "don't expect a room. Ridgefield's a town that invites no one to linger, where the services contemplate residents only, but which makes it in my book a piss-poor place to live" (197).

Ann's new hometown, Deep River, supersedes even Ridgefield as a place constructed and populated according to economic "compatibility." Upon arriving, Frank endures the attentions of a zealous "rent-a-cop" (233), a member of the private security force employed to drive around Deep River surveilling non-residents. Though it is no surprise that Frank dislikes Ann's second husband, Charley O'Dell, such personal feelings do not fully account for Frank's sense that Deep River "is not such a great place to think of your children living (or your ex-wife)" (230). Frank contrasts his own sense of place with that of the architect O'Dell. He fleetingly admits an "unexpected admiration toward meisterbuilder O'Dell's big blue house on the knoll; and to what a great, if impersonal, true-to-your-dreams *home* it is--a place any modern family [...] ought to feel lamebrained not to make a reasonably good go of life in." Frank ruefully recalls his own inability to shrug off "a sense of contingency" back when "we all were a tidy family in our own substantial house in Haddam" (283-284). However, pursuing this contrast, Frank attacks Charley's literal<sup>19</sup> design for life:

It always seemed to me enough just to know that someone loved you and would go on loving you forever [...] and that the *mise-en-scène* for love was only that and not a character in the play itself.

Charley, of course, is of the decidedly *other* view, the one that believes a good structure implies a good structure [...] This, in Charley's view, constitutes life and no doubt truth: strict physical moorings. (284)

For all the personal animosity, Frank's critique of Charley's philosophy is entirely consistent with his wider critique of the capitalist fetishisation of place. Though Frank continues to wonder whether it would be better if he were able to "speak [to Paul] from some more established *place*" (285), he eventually reaffirms his

sense that human relations, however contingent, are more important than finding the “fixed point” of a fetishised “*place*.” In contrast, O’Dell exemplifies de Certeau’s “strategist” who, via “the establishment of a place of power (the property of a proper),” attempts to control social relations—even at the quotidian level of the family.<sup>20</sup>

Upon arriving in Cooperstown, Bascombe admits to a suspicion “that the town is just a replica (of a legitimate place), a period backdrop to the Hall of Fame [...] with nothing authentic (crime, despair, litter, the rapture) really going on no matter what civic illusion the city fathers maintain” (293). To this degree, Cooperstown exemplifies those towns that have been, in Soja’s words, “recreated as simulacra, exact copies for which the original no longer exists.” In his brief analysis of *Independence Day*, Guinn observes that Cooperstown is the endpoint of “a trip through a commercial landscape of almost unbelievable crassness.” Yet Frank is pleased to see that, “[u]nlike stolid Deep River and stiff-necked Ridgefield, Cooperstown has more than ample 4th of July street regalia.” Frank further qualifies his initial dismay at Cooperstown’s apparently inauthentic sense of place. He decides that it is “still a potentially perfect setting in which to woo one’s son away from his problems and bestow good counsel” (293). Despite its “unbelievable crassness,” the capitalist carnival of Cooperstown is preferable to the lifestyle enclave of Deep River. It becomes the “legitimate place” for Frank and Paul to redefine a family life undermined by “the geography of divorce.”<sup>21</sup>

The trip to Cooperstown also provides Frank with one final opportunity to elucidate his theory that so-called “community” has become inextricable from economic “compatibility.” This situation arises after Paul is injured in a batting cage at the Baseball Hall of Fame. A passer-by offering assistance turns out to be

Irv Ornstein, Frank's stepbrother. The two men have not seen one another in years and Irv, having recently felt "detached from his own personal history" (388), now experiences a transcendent sense of life's continuity. Irv's "*true interest*, one that makes his happy life a sort of formal investigation of firmer stuff beyond the limits of simulation"--he designs flight simulators--is a search for authentic, continuous "community." This leads him to suggest that Frank, being "in the realty business," must constantly encounter people's desire for "continuity [...] in the community sense" (386). Awaiting the diagnosis of Paul's eye injury outside a hospital in Ononta, Frank takes this incongruous opportunity to restate his realtor's sense that, like "place," "community" has become contingent upon the market economy:

I don't really think communities are continuous, Irv [...] I think of them--and I've got a lot of proof--as isolated, contingent groups trying to improve on an illusion of permanence, which they fully accept as an illusion [...] Buying power is the instrumentality. But continuity, if I understand it at all, doesn't really have much to do with it. (386)

Even in the midst of a minor family crisis, Frank argues coherently and insistently that the concept of "community" is, like that of "place," less "transcendent" than subject to immanent, economic reality. In this context, Irv's continuous community sounds eerily like Davidson's "stable community which is really a community, not a mere real estate development." With his accumulated realtor's "proof" that real estate speculation is the "instrumentality," Frank exposes Irv's ideal as an anachronism and a fallacy. Put another way: the man who designs flight simulators also simulates a sense of "community" for which, like the Agrarians' proprietary ideal, "the original no longer exists"--if it ever did.<sup>22</sup>

## IV

*Independence as a socio-spatial practice: Frank in Haddam on Independence Day*

Having recognised that “sense of place” and “sense of community” have been rendered redundant, or at least highly contingent, by capitalism, Frank instead formulates his own sense of independence. The concept of independence first comes to the fore when Frank sends his son Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” and “The Declaration of Independence” in preparation for the trip to Cooperstown. Frank believes that “independence is, in fact, what he [Paul] lacks-- independence from whatever holds him captive: memory, history, bad events he struggles with, can’t control, but feels he should” (16). However, Frank’s conception of independence goes beyond this negative freedom, or the will to (vulgar) individualism. In an interview with *Salon*, Ford stated that, in *Independence Day*, he wanted to redefine the “conventional sense” of independence as “putting distance between yourself and other people.” Ford wondered “if independence could in fact mean a freedom to make contact with others, rather than just the freedom to sever oneself from others.” In the novel, Frank utilises a revised sense of independence to finally “make contact with others.” By doing so, Frank achieves semi-autonomy--if not Irv-esque “transcendence”--from the everyday immanence of buying and selling real estate. Frank puts his theory into practice during the final section of the novel, in which he (eventually) joins in Haddam’s holiday celebrations.<sup>23</sup>

Initially, Frank is doubtful about the meaning of Fourth of July, feeling “as though independence were *only* private and too crucial to celebrate with others.” Furthermore, Haddam’s Fourth of July festivities are more commercialised than carnivalesque, located as they are in Haddam’s Central Business District (CBD),

transitory home of Benetton/Foot Locker and Laura Ashley/The Gap. Frank believes that this privatised space should be put to more public use: "I, in fact, wouldn't be sad or consider myself an antidevelopment traitor to see the whole shebang fold its tents and leave the business to our own merchants in town; turn the land into a people's park or a public vegetable garden; make friends in a new way" (425). Feeling alienated by the holiday's commodification, Frank leaves the CBD and drives towards his old family home on Hoving Road. This return to the site of his \$1 million-plus house nearly causes Frank to regress into the familiar, fetishistic fantasy of place: "it's worth asking again: is there any cause to think a place--any place--within its plaster and joists, its trees and plantings, in its putative essence *ever* shelters some spirit ghost of us as proof of its significance and ours?" Finally, though, Frank refuses the alluring "sanction," the mystical "essence" of place. The fact that Frank's former house is unrecognisable, having been converted into a conference centre, only confirms that, under capitalism, material "place" is prone to instability, to creative destruction. Instead, the brief diversion to Hoving Road helps Frank to reaffirm his faith in the socio-spatial practice of everyday life. Frank recognises that interaction with "other humans" is what makes existential meaning: "We just have to be smart enough to quit asking places for what they can't provide, and begin to invent other options--the way Joe Markham has [...]--as gestures of our [...] independence" (442).<sup>24</sup>

Frank himself is reoriented to social relations when he encounters his old associate Carter Knott. Carter is not a close friend--indeed, in *The Sportswriter*, Frank's awkward relationship with Carter prompted the observation that "the suburbs are not a place where friendships flourish." Nonetheless, "[b]y using Carter's presence," Frank staves off the sense of "sadness, displacement, lack of



sanction" provoked by his yearning for the Hoving Road house (445). This brief encounter gives Frank the will to rejoin the festivities in Haddam CBD, where he makes a significant "gesture" towards his revised sense of independence. In the last lines of *Independence Day*, we witness Frank "narrow that space [...] that separates people" and "make contact with others" in the middle of the Fourth of July crowd: "The trumpets go again. My heartbeat quickens. I feel the push, pull, the weave and sway of others" (451).<sup>25</sup>

## V

### *Conclusion: Richard Ford's Postsouthern Sense of Place*

In *The Southern Writer and the Postmodern World* (1991), Fred Hobson ingeniously but, I think, misguidedly tries to recover *The Sportswriter* as a "southern" novel. Hobson attempts this recovery partly on the premise that Frank Bascombe "has a great desire, nearly a compulsion, to link with place, whether the place is suburban New Jersey or Detroit." Despite having acknowledged that Ford's work reveals no "particular allegiance to geographical place, southern or otherwise," Hobson ultimately perpetrates the fallacy that because Frank is "keenly attuned to place," he is somehow essentially "southern." However, the sportswriter's peripatetic (to recite Percy's term) "immanence of consumption" in the capitalist landscape of postsouthern America differs from anything in the "southern literary tradition"—not only the (neo-) Agrarian tradition that has emphasized the rural "stable community," but also the "non-Faulkner" Percyan tradition to which Hobson refers. In *The Sportswriter*, Frank exhibits, in John Crowe Ransom's disapproving definition, "the character of our urbanized, anti-provincial, progressive and mobile American life that [...] is in a condition of

external flux.” But the second Bascombe book goes further by showing just how thoroughly the Agrarian proprietary ideal has been displaced by finance capitalist real estate. Moreover, in *Independence Day* it is clearer than ever that Frank cannot follow Binx Bolling by resurrecting some residual idea of “the South,” or by returning to a sanctuary like the Garden District. In the Residential Specialist’s postsouthern America, such “southern” meta-concepts as “place” and “community,” to the extent that they mean anything, are contingent upon land speculation and development.<sup>26</sup>

And yet, *Independence Day* is finally more hopeful than *The Sportswriter*--not to mention *A Piece of My Heart*, the debut novel that moved from postsouthern parody to grim nihilism. During the course of his second narrative, Frank gains a genuine understanding of the flux and inequality that characterises capitalist geographies. More than that, he also resolves his own “predicament of placement” (as well as the Markhams’). As we have seen, in *The Moviegoer* Binx was so horrified by the capitalist production of place as (sub)urban real estate that he rhetorically displaced the very phenomenon from Louisiana to Illinois. By contrast, and nearly thirty years later, Frank Bascombe remains optimistic that one can achieve a “sense of place”--however contingent--through the practice of everyday life *within* the capitalist spatial economy of postsouthern America.

If Hobson’s critical approach to *The Sportswriter* is flawed, it cannot hold when transferred to *Independence Day*. Imitating Hobson’s approach to the first Bascombe novel--trying to identify a subterranean “Southern” sense of place or community in the sequel--proves very problematic. As we have already seen, Frank dismisses Mississippi’s supposedly essential sense of place by comparing it to Haddam’s “simple setting.” Later, Frank does claim that Wallace Hill “could be

a neighborhood in the Mississippi Delta.” However, he adds the qualification that “the local cars at the curb are all snazzy van conversions and late-model Fords and Chevys” (119). Hence, this casual, comparative reference to the South subtly implies that, however much Wallace Hill has been segregated from the rest of Haddam, it remains a more prosperous black “community” than those generally found in Mississippi. It is true that Frank believes Wallace Hill’s black residents may yet move “down South,” thereby suggesting that the region yet retains a powerful pull for *black* Americans (and an attraction stronger than anything our narrator feels for his birthplace). But by adding that the South is “where their ancestors were once property themselves,” Frank reminds us that, for all the Agrarian emphasis on agricultural real property, the region’s peculiar identity was premised upon the *human* property relations of slavery. In the end, Frank’s very few “Southern” citations serve to remind us that, as Charles Reagan Wilson observes, “place” has often been a code word “to indicate the status of blacks” in a hierarchical society. It proves impossible to excavate some positive, absent presence of “the South” and its “sense of place” from *Independence Day*. Rather than recouring to some residually “Southern” sense of place or community, Frank resolves his predicament of placement—his earlier immersion in the capitalist geographies of postsouthern America—through his revised sense of independence. Ultimately, it is perhaps only within the context of *A Piece of My Heart*, *The Sportswriter* and some of Ford’s essays that one can even perceive how *Independence Day* extends the author’s postsouthern critique of “the South” and the “southern literary tradition.”<sup>27</sup>

Having said that, *Independence Day*’s final reference to “the South” is a somewhat clearer case of postsouthern, intertextual parody. Frank reveals that he

is considering being buried in Cut Off, Louisiana, because it is a place that has “minimum earthly history.” Larry McMurtry might be surprised, but Frank is anything but burdened by this Deep South site; it is, in fact, even more of a non-place than Esperance, New York (439). What is more, by slyly invoking Shut Off, Louisiana, as featured in Percy’s *The Last Gentleman* (1966), Ford sounds another subtle “answering knell” to the anti-Northern, anti-urban prejudice sometimes apparent in Percy’s novels.<sup>28</sup>

For all that Richard Ford’s fiction critiques the production of postmodern capitalist geographies, it never returns to a foundational “South.” In a 1979 conversation with Louis Rubin, Robert Penn Warren stated his belief that “this term ‘Sun Belt’ is a realtor’s term, and that captures the whole story.”<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly for someone who once professed the Agrarian proprietary ideal, the role of real estate and the resulting resignification of “the South” was responsible for the degradation of the region’s sense of place. In 1977, in his essay on Percy, Ford similarly remarked that “[t]he south is not a place any more; it’s a Belt, a business proposition, which is the nearest thing to anonymity the economy recognizes.”<sup>30</sup> However, Ford’s Frank Bascombe shares none of the nostalgia that Warren and Welty evidently felt for “the South” as it was before the advent of the Sun Belt and its (in Welty’s dismissive term) “real estate people.”<sup>31</sup> As we have seen in the last three chapters, Ford’s literary cartographies differ from even the proto-postsouthern (non-) places depicted in Walker Percy’s work. In his review-essay of *Lancelot*, Ford observed that: “For Percy, the south is simply the landscape he knows [...] firm, if temporary, ground from which to see and speak to the rest of the country.”<sup>32</sup> Since he published *A Piece of My Heart* in 1976, Ford himself has rejected “the South” on even those limited terms, indicting the

“indefensible restrictions of an outdated geography” imposed by “Southern literature.”<sup>33</sup> Frank Bascombe--born in Mississippi, but realtor-resident of New Jersey--speaks to us from the late capitalist landscape of postsouthern America.

### **Part Three**

## **Placing the Postsouthern “International City”: the Atlanta Conundrum**

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Locating a Non-Place: Atlanta's Absence from Southern Literature and the Emergence of a Postsouthern "International City"

On 19 July 1996, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* published an essay by the Natchez-born novelist Ellen Douglas. Douglas' short piece ostensibly was written in honour of the Olympics, the international sporting jamboree that Atlanta was about to host. However, Douglas began by noting that Southern writers, literary critics and academics "have been talking for a couple of generations about 'Place' and 'the Sense of Place.'" Douglas expressed some scepticism towards this literary-critical consensus, asserting that "[a]ll this sometimes seems to me blown out of proportion." In passing--and sounding similar to Eudora Welty in "Some Notes on River Country"--Douglas did acknowledge the "solid" and "permanent" quality of her own "South": "green black magnolia trees with leaves as thick as shoe leather, dark cedars weighed down with moss." However, Douglas focused "not [on] the changing South," but on the Earth, "our neighborhood--the only place we have." Douglas worried that this planetary "Sense of Place" was imperilled by "the final choking dose of poison, the weight of too many billion people, the loss of too many billion trees."<sup>1</sup>

By shifting the focus from "the South" to the Earth itself, Ellen Douglas advanced an eco-critical perspective that also suitably affirmed the Olympian ideal of an international community. The essay might even be loosely defined as an example of literary postsouthernism to the extent that Douglas queries the

provincial "Sense of Place" that traditionally has been privileged in "Southern literature." Yet it is curious that Douglas makes no reference to the Olympic host city itself. At the most obvious level, the (sub)urban sprawl of metropolitan Atlanta strikingly differs from the Weltyan, rural-natural "Sense of Place" that Douglas briefly recites. But Atlanta also epitomises a rather different "worldly" perspective than the one Douglas eventually offers. I am referring to the city's burgeoning role in the finance-capitalist world-system. Over the last few decades, this "Southern" city has increasingly situated and defined itself in relation to what sociologist Manuel Castells calls the "space of flows," the "global network of capital flows." When Douglas observes that we "have gotten dislocated in our time in a large and different way," she is referring to how, "since we first saw the pictures of Earth from space," we have reconceived our *regional* "Sense of Place" from a *cosmic* perspective. Yet in another context, Douglas' words could have been referring to the sense of dislocation--what anthropologist Charles Rutheiser has called the "sense of placelessness"--engendered by a city that exists in a (cash) nexus between the *local* and the *global*, between material property and abstract capital. Douglas might have been describing the "generic urbanism" of a self-styled "international city" that not only is built by multinational corporations, but also is a banking centre for the transnational circulation of capital.<sup>2</sup>

In Part 3 of this thesis, I hope to show that Atlanta's spatial (re)production and narrative representation--not only by novelists, but also by boosters--is of great interest and importance when considering the reality of place in the post-South. I will consider how Anne Rivers Siddons' *Peachtree Road* (1988), Tom Wolfe's *A Man in Full* (1998) and Toni Cade Bambara's *Those Bones Are Not My Child* (1999) depict the postsouthern "international city" and its sense of place--or



sense of placelessness, as the case may be. First, though, I want to take a sceptical backward glance in order to assess Atlanta's historical absence from the canonical cartography of "Southern literature." Douglas perhaps necessarily demurs from analysing the Olympian locus in order to expound her ecological worldview. I want to argue that, more generally, Atlanta's status as a "non-place" in Southern letters is inextricable from its long-established role as the locus classicus of the urban, capitalist "New South."

## I

### *Agrarianism and Atlanta as a New South Non-Place*

I don't understand why there aren't twenty novels set in Atlanta.

Tom Wolfe, 1998<sup>3</sup>

In 1864, Union General William Tecumseh Sherman ordered the annihilation of Atlanta; the following year, the Confederacy suffered its final defeat. However, it was not long before native politicians and businessmen began to reinvent Atlanta, materially and rhetorically, as the centre of a "New South" based upon the North's urban, industrial capitalist model. Rutheiser observes that, even in the 1870s, Atlantans were beginning to term their city "the New York or Chicago of the South (the choice, presumably, depending on which group of Northern businessmen they were courting)." Atlanta's pioneering adoption of what Paul Gaston has termed the "New South Creed" soon brought the city to national attention. In 1886, the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, Henry Grady, stood before a New York audience of bankers and industrialists--including Atlanta's nemesis Sherman, whom Grady jokingly chided "for being a little

careless with fire"--and made his notorious "New South" speech. Grady advocated Southern economic progress empowered by Northern capital.<sup>4</sup>

Later Atlanta boosters perpetuated the capitalist ethos underpinning Grady's "New South" vision. In 1925, the city's Chamber of Commerce conceived a marketing campaign, "Forward Atlanta," that aimed to sell the city to national corporations. As well as coining the concept, oft-cited ever since, of an "Atlanta Spirit," Forward Atlanta subsidised a book, *Atlanta from the Ashes* (1928), written by the Chamber of Commerce president, Ivan Allen. However, as William Gleason notes, "[t]he 'Atlanta Spirit' of the 1920s" caused many Southerners to ponder upon "what rough beast was slouching toward Atlanta to be born." Indeed, Allen's tome, "the perfect embodiment of the Atlanta Spirit in action," was indirectly challenged by another text that appeared two years later: the Agrarian manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*. Gleason identifies *I'll Take My Stand* as a declaration against the "frenzied materialism" of New South Atlanta. Similarly, Rutheiser observes that "the 'Nashville Agrarians' delivered a stinging ruralized riposte to the urbanized, industrializing ethos of the New South Creed and, by way of association, to Atlanta as well."<sup>5</sup> Rutheiser rightly adds that *I'll Take My Stand's* critique of Atlanta was only ever implicit. Only retrospectively did the most unreconstructed Agrarian, Donald Davidson, state explicitly the Fugitive-Agrarian opposition to those businessmen who were less interested in art than "the price of cotton or the value of real estate in Atlanta." Nevertheless, when John Crowe Ransom charged that "[t]he urban South, with its heavy importation of regular American ways and regular American citizens, has nearly capitulated" to Northern industrial capitalism, he might as well have identified Atlanta directly. And when Ransom scorned "the local chambers of commerce [that] exhibit the

formidable data of Southern progress," he likely had Allen and his cohorts in mind.<sup>6</sup>

I discussed the Agrarians' influence upon novelists and critics, together with the neo-Agrarian invention of the Southern literary "sense of place," in Chapter 2; it need not be recapitulated here. More specifically, though, one might ponder to what extent the Agrarians and their neo-Agrarian successors have ensured Atlanta's peculiar absence from "Southern literature." There is a distinctive narrative divergence between the Agrarians' representation of Southern place as anti-urban, anti-industrial and (albeit implicitly) anti-Atlanta, and the city boosters' simultaneous promotion of Atlanta as the New South's commercial hub. To put it another way, the Agrarians' proprietary ideal, centred upon "concrete," agricultural real property, comes up against the abstract, economic "value of real estate in Atlanta." The Southern Renaissance occurred even as Atlanta was declaring--and achieving--economic eminence within both region and nation. Yet Atlanta is, at best, marginal to a canonical literary-critical cartography of "the South" in which Welty's Mississippi River Country or Faulkner's hand-drawn map of Yoknapatawpha are sited and recited as (the rural) ground zero. I want to suggest that Atlanta's anomalous status in "Southern literature" at least partly derives from a novel published in the same year as *Absalom, Absalom!* (in which Faulkner's famous map appeared): Margaret Mitchell's phenomenally popular *Gone with the Wind*.

*Atlanta real estate and Tara's sense of place: Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind*

In the first part of *Gone with the Wind*, set in the immediate antebellum period, it becomes clear that the heroine, Scarlett O'Hara, has an ambiguous

relationship to her family's plantation, Tara, and to the planter class society of Clayton County. To be sure, Scarlett enjoys the social whirl of balls and garden parties, and she is never required to recognise that this leisurely existence is founded upon slave labour. However, Scarlett cannot comprehend her father's core belief that "[l]and is the only thing in the world that amounts to anything [...] the only thing worth working for, worth fighting for--worth dying for."<sup>7</sup>

If Scarlett is indifferent to her homeplace, she is overtly hostile to established Southern cities such as Savannah and Charleston, both of which she visits after the death of her first husband, Charles Hamilton. It is only when she moves to Atlanta in May 1862 that Scarlett achieves a personal sense of place. For Scarlett, Atlanta stands in favourable contrast to both the "rural leisure and quiet" (145) of Clayton County and the "serene and quiet old cities" (150) of the South: "Scarlett had always liked Atlanta for the very same reason that made Savannah, Augusta and Macon condemn it. Like herself, the town was a mixture of the old and new in Georgia, in which the old often came off second best in its conflicts with the self-willed and vigorous new" (141). Scarlett identifies with Atlanta's "new" urban vigour--a modern vitality evident even during the war. However, Scarlett speculates far more, financially and personally, in the fortunes of *postbellum* Atlanta. In *Recasting: Gone with the Wind in American Culture* (1983), Kenneth O'Brien observes (and Louis Rubin and Richard King concur) that Scarlett's "successes are all associated with Atlanta and its rebirth during Reconstruction as the business capital of the Lower South." When Scarlett returns to a devastated Atlanta shortly after the war, she is "cheered by the sight of new buildings going up all along the street." Admiring Atlanta's endurance, she anticipates the city's resurgence: "They couldn't lick you. You'll grow back just as

big and sassy as you used to be!" (540). Scarlett's own involvement in the literal "reconstruction" of Atlanta--the redevelopment of the city's real estate--is tangible and profitable. She shrewdly invests in two sawmills that are ideally located to supply the lumber needed to rebuild the city. With a scrupulousness that astounds Atlanta's keepers of the Lost Cause, she even sells lumber to the "Carpetbaggers and Scallawags" who are "building fine homes and stores and hotels with their new wealth" (654).<sup>8</sup>

Rubin rightly notes that "the breakdown of the old plantation society serve[s] to liberate Scarlett." Yet *Gone with the Wind* still manages to eulogise the plantation-based Old South--a mythical time and place apotheosised in Tara. Rubin observes that "Mitchell's depiction of prewar plantation society is romanticized and false." However, it is only upon achieving financial success in *postwar* Atlanta that *Scarlett* (rather than Mitchell) romanticises Tara. I want to emphasise that Scarlett's own "romanticized and false" simulation of the Old South--her postbellum recreation of Tara as a site of neo-Confederate nostalgia, despite her antebellum scepticism toward Gerald's transcendent vision of Southern land-value--is mediated by a complex nexus of (as Frank Bascombe might term it) "socio-emotio-economic" investments.<sup>9</sup>

Scarlett first feels her father's sense of homeplace upon returning to Tara during the siege of Atlanta. In a passage anticipating Ike McCaslin's metaphysical aesthetics of place in Faulkner's "The Bear," Scarlett discovers that "[s]he could not desert Tara; she belonged to the red acres far more than they could ever belong to her. Her roots went deep into the blood-coloured soil and sucked up life, as did the cotton" (411). Returning to Atlanta in 1866, Scarlett struggles to reconcile herself to the fact "that Atlanta and not Tara was her permanent home

now" (599). She feels "the ache that was even stronger than fear of losing the mills, the ache to see Tara again [...] She loved Atlanta but--oh, for the sweet peace and country quiet of Tara, the red fields and the dark pines about it!" (670). There would seem to be an irreconcilable tension between Scarlett's bourgeois capitalist association with the material reconstruction of Atlanta, and her metaphysical romance with Tara as a remnant of antebellum life.

However, this apparent tension is resolved (or averted) precisely because Scarlett embodies the New South Creed. As King observes by way of Gaston, while "the New South advocates [...] sanctioned industrial development under the dispensation of laissez-faire capitalism," they also "celebrated the antebellum South." By this equation, Scarlett is an exemplary New Southerner: though she becomes a prominent businesswoman in Atlanta, she gradually moderates her notorious disdain for the Confederate Cause and nurtures a nostalgic yearning for her Clayton County roots. Therefore, it is entirely appropriate that the very capital that Scarlett acquires from Atlanta's New South redevelopment facilitates the creation of Tara's Old South sense of place.<sup>10</sup>

Scarlett's career as a New South capitalist in Atlanta is partly determined by the realisation that, after the war, the farm-cum-plantation economy of Clayton County is no longer self-sufficient. She experiences an epiphany "in the midst of [the] ruins" at the Wilkes family plantation, Twelve Oaks: "[t]here was no going back and she was going forward" (419). Yet Scarlett still hopes that Tara and the Old South itself will rise again: "Tara had risen to riches on cotton, even as the whole South had risen, and Scarlett was Southerner enough to believe that both Tara and the South would rise again out of the red fields" (447). It takes Will Benteen, the "Cracker" who runs Tara in Scarlett's frequent postwar absence, to

tell her that “[t]his section won’t come back for fifty years--if it ever comes back [...] Tara’s [...] a farm, a two-mule farm, not a plantation” (950). It is Atlanta that proves resurgent--and it is Atlanta that maintains Tara. When Scarlett’s first mill begins to make money, “[m]ost of it went to Tara and she wrote interminable letters to Will Benteen telling him just how it should be spent” (622). Thus, it is the profit from Atlanta’s urban development that, transferred to Tara, enables Scarlett’s ideological fetishisation of the antebellum homeplace as an Old Southern haven. In the last instance, Tara’s (meta)physics of place are inextricable from Scarlett’s economic investments in Atlanta.<sup>11</sup>

Towards the end of the novel, Scarlett’s old flame Ashley Wilkes admits that he “want[s] the old days back again.” In response to Ashley, Scarlett explicitly states that “I like these days better” (901). Though she wavers momentarily when she remembers the “lazy days and warm still country twilights! The high soft laughter from the [slave] quarters,” Scarlett is New Southerner enough to realise that the Cotton Kingdom will not rise again. She well knows that, whether she “like[s] these days better” or not, it is Atlanta’s profitable redevelopment that enables Tara’s survival (albeit in simulated form). At the very end of the novel, needing a “quiet place to lick her wounds” (1010) after the showdown with Rhett Butler, Scarlett goes home again. However, *Gone with the Wind*’s famous last words, “to-morrow is another day” (1011), suggest that even now Scarlett will not remain at Tara--not only because she wants Rhett back, but also because she must return to Atlanta to make the money that maintains Tara itself.<sup>12</sup>

*Gone with the Wind* is rarely considered as a canonical Southern Renaissance text. Of course, as Richard Dwyer has suggested, critics have held the novel’s very

popularity against it. Dwyer cites the measly entry on Margaret Mitchell in Rubin's *A Biobibliographical Guide to Southern Literature* (1969) as typical of the critical response. Faulkner's advocate Malcolm Cowley initiated this tradition of critical disdain in the year of the novel's publication. It should be clear by now that Cowley was simplifying somewhat when he claimed that "*Gone with the Wind* is an encyclopedia of the plantation legend." However, as Darden Pyron has observed, Cowley's attitude "helps to illuminate the mystery of *Gone with the Wind*'s place, or 'non-place,' in American letters."<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, one doubts whether Mitchell's "plantation legend" is what determined the novel's "non-place" in *Southern* letters. It is true that even John Crowe Ransom expressed distaste for Mitchell's excessive Old Southernism. However, considering Ransom's impassioned support for the unregenerate Southerner who "look[s] backward rather than forward," one suspects that he could not condone Scarlett's New South belief that "[n]o one could go forward with a load of aching memories" (901). Moreover, not only does *Gone with the Wind* represent Reconstruction-era Atlanta as what King calls the "*locus classicus* of the New South spirit," but also it affirms the "Atlanta Spirit" of the 1920s. When Ivan Allen and his civic-corporate cohorts proclaimed "Forward Atlanta," they would simply have confirmed Ransom's jaundiced view of chambers of commerce. But it was surely more surprising for Ransom--and the Agrarians generally--to come across an *artist* who depicted a heroine "going forward" to Atlanta to be reborn through real estate. Via the process that Georg Lukács calls "modernisation," *Gone with the Wind* becomes inextricable from the boosterism of its author's own time and place. Mitchell took her stand with "real estate in Atlanta," not the Agrarian aesthetic of anti-development.<sup>14</sup>



Ultimately, Mitchell's positive image of Atlanta as the archetypal site of New South capitalism surely rankled with the Agrarian and neo-Agrarian arbiters of "Southern literature" rather more than her romantic depiction of Tara. *Gone with the Wind's* pro-New South, pro-urban and pro-capitalist ethos challenges, at least implicitly, the rural, traditional visions of place propounded in *I'll Take My Stand*. Indeed, one wonders whether Atlanta's peculiar status as a "non-place" in "Southern literature" is related to the fact that, for the Agrarians and for many neo-Agrarian critics, a capitalist city is by definition a non-place. Employing Pierre Macherey's theory of the significance of absence, Richard Gray has argued that *I'll Take My Stand's* general silence on the subject of slavery is a conspicuous lacuna that "helps us locate the vision of the world [...] that underpins all the essays in the symposium." Considering Atlanta's social significance from Reconstruction through the 1920s to the present, one might similarly suggest that the city's absence from (neo-) Agrarian mappings of "Southern literature" reveals the ideological criteria behind, and the lacunae within, the literary-critical "sense of place."<sup>15</sup>

Whatever the evasions of novelists and literary critics, Margaret Mitchell's representation of Scarlett's Atlanta as the New South's capital of capital remains vivid--and relevant. This image of Atlanta anticipates, in different ways, the narrative cartographies I discuss in Chapters 8 to 10. If nothing else, *Gone with the Wind's* example suggests that the contemporary writer--whether novelist or critic, neo-Agrarian or "Left Winger" (Mitchell's own scornful term)--cannot just ignore Atlanta's continuing status as a place defined by capitalist property relations.<sup>16</sup>

*Anti-Agrarianism and Coca-Cola: Flannery O'Connor's Atlanta*

Almost two decades after Mitchell's novel was published, Flannery O'Connor critiqued Atlanta's peculiar commercial status as a Confederate shrine--an image which largely derived from the movie version of *Gone with the Wind*. As Rutheiser observes, David Selznick's 1939 film has given "[u]ntold millions of persons [...] a misleading impression of Atlanta as a city of the Old South, not unlike Charleston and Savannah." Scarlett O'Hara, so derisive towards these more established cities, might have been amused by this cinematic revisioning of Atlanta; Margaret Mitchell actually "yelped with laughter" at the film's "gentrification" of her novel. Nevertheless, when Atlanta's boosters seized upon Selznick's simulacrum of an Old South city, they too were acting in accordance with the New South Creed. The movie's aristocratic, antebellum Atlanta provided an unprecedented opportunity to promote the modern capitalist city. Mayor William Hartsfield brought the movie premiere to Atlanta despite his personal distaste for the Old South mythology of "magnolias and beautiful ladies and soft nights." As Frederick Allen has noted, Hartsfield felt that for all "Hollywood might have distorted the Atlanta of the Civil War era [...] at least its impresarios and stars were endorsing the Atlanta of 1939 as a place of glamour and cosmopolitan taste."<sup>17</sup>

In O'Connor's 1953 story "A Late Encounter with the Enemy," the fake Confederate hero, General Tennessee Flintrock Sash, cannot actually remember the Civil War. He does, however, proudly recall his role in the Atlanta movie premiere. According to Sash, there "wasn't a thing local about it"--it was a "nashnul event" featuring "beautiful guls" from "Hollywood, California." The narrative subtly suggests what is not apparent to Sash himself: that the *Gone With*

*the Wind* “premy” was a mediated spectacle in which neo-Confederate nationalism was incorporated to the marketing of modern Atlanta as a city of “nashnul” significance. “A Late Encounter with the Enemy” does not only suggest that the South’s collective memory has become cinematically and commercially mediated. O’Connor’s story also asks whether contemporary (1950s) capitalism pays any deference to Old South tradition, as did the earlier practitioners of the New South Creed. In the closing lines, the story symbolically suggests that Confederate iconography has given way to commodity fetishism. When Sash dies during his granddaughter’s graduation ceremony, the young boy entrusted with caring for the old man waits with the corpse next to a vending machine dispensing Atlanta’s most famous commodity: Coca-Cola.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, “A Late Encounter with the Enemy” is less favourable towards Atlanta than *Gone with the Wind*. However, simply by acknowledging the existence of the New South capitalist city the story can be seen as part of O’Connor’s quite radical critique of the (neo-) Agrarian literary-critical cartography that has privileged and idealised the rural South. In the novella *Wise Blood* (1952) and various short stories, O’Connor depicts the startling spatial disjunction between Atlanta and the surrounding rural and small-town South. O’Connor’s most detailed textual map of this urban-rural opposition is “The Artificial Nigger” (1955). In this story, one Mr Head takes his grandson Nelson to Atlanta, where the boy was born, to show him “that the city is not a great place.”<sup>19</sup> Having reared Nelson in a rural county from which blacks have been banished, Head now wants to destroy the boy’s pride in his birthplace. The old man begins by representing Atlanta as a place “full of niggers” (252). However, when Nelson gazes into the “store windows, jammed with every kind of equipment—hardware, drygoods,

chicken feed, liquor," his fascination with Atlanta only increases. Indeed, whereas the central business district enraptures Nelson, Head is terrified--on a previous visit to Atlanta, he literally lost all sense of place while walking through a labyrinthine department store (258).

Head attempts to reassert his authority over Nelson by describing the city's sewers in such a manner that the boy "connected the sewer passages with the entrance to hell and understood for the first time how the world was put together in its lower parts" (259). When the pair subsequently blunder into a black residential neighbourhood, Head declares the city a "nigger heaven" (261), implying that the racial-spatial otherworldliness of Atlanta constitutes a (white man's) hell on earth. As Head and Nelson wander further away from the railway station and central business district, the disoriented grandfather attempts to "teach [the] child a lesson" (264) about urban alienation. Head hides from Nelson, but his plan goes calamitously wrong when the frantic boy, believing himself abandoned, knocks down an elderly woman, causing a minor public scandal. Plagued by guilt, the grandfather now sees Atlanta as his own gateway to hell--"if he saw a sewer entrance he would drop down into it and let himself be carried away" (267)--and as the site of his personal judgement day: "He knew that if dark overtook them in the city, they would be beaten and robbed. The speed of God's justice was only what he expected for himself, but he could not stand to think that his sins would be visited upon Nelson" (266).

Yet Head manages to avert this sense of impending damnation, and to reassert his anti-Atlanta authority, when he and Nelson enter "an elegant suburban section where mansions were set back from the road by lawns" (267). The pair encounter the "artificial nigger" of the story's title, a "plaster figure of a

Negro sitting bent over on a low yellow brick fence that curved around a wide lawn." Head solemnly pronounces that "[t]hey ain't got enough real ones here. They got to have an artificial one" (269). Arguably, Head here misreads the racial and economic construction of Atlanta's social geography. Despite having walked through distinct racially segregated and unevenly developed areas of Atlanta, Head fails to recognise that this wealthy suburb excludes living black Southerners--and that to this degree, the city suburb is much like Head's rural home county. Nonetheless, this declaration of Atlanta's racial otherness allows the old man to reconcile the Heads to their own "home" (269)--to a familiar sense of place that had been reduced to "nothing" (268) by the day's disastrous events. Upon disembarking back in the country, Head feels he has achieved God's mercy and is ready to "enter Paradise" (270).

In an intriguing 1983 essay, H.R. Stoneback interpreted "sense of place" in O'Connor's "The Displaced Person" against the grain of criticism by C. Hugh Holman and Louis Rubin that assessed the story from the "Agrarian vision of experience." Stoneback argued that it is actually "the countryside [that] is hell, rather than Atlanta or New York, to name just two of the urban 'non-places' against which O'Connor characters (and readers) frequently direct their topophobia." Adapting Stoneback's polemical perspective, one might argue that Head, in his brief moment of penitence, fails to see that Atlanta's sewer system is not the entrance to hell but rather "a kind of Purgatory, the required displacement [from the false rural Eden] in the rite of passage to grace." Instead, Head banishes his guilt by using the "artificial nigger" to redeem his country homeplace as a racial, rural Paradise. However, the reader remains cognisant of the contrast between Head's moment of penitential despair in Atlanta, and his final, frantic

desire to recover his worldly home as Eden. As such, the end of the story is stinging ironic: by abandoning the urban purgatory and returning to his rural sanctuary, Head is living on bad faith.<sup>20</sup>

One should note that, even when mapping capitalist development and urban segregation, O'Connor is not really focussing on *Atlanta's* "sense of place." She is more concerned to interrogate the supposed virtues of the rural South. This is also true of "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" (1953) and "A Circle in the Fire" (1954), two other stories that briefly cite Atlanta. Here too, O'Connor's white, rural characters define their own smug, complacent sense of place by rhetorically inventing Atlanta as an otherly dystopia. To this extent, O'Connor utilises Atlanta to undermine the foundational Agrarian conception of place. Ultimately though, it is not only because the city is refracted through the distorted rural perspectives of Head and others that O'Connor's stories only obliquely reveal the material reality of 1950s Atlanta. O'Connor's radical sense of place is finally subservient to, even submerged by, her overwhelming religious beliefs. It should be apparent from Stoneback's language, not to mention my own, that it is difficult not to reach for religious terms when discussing O'Connor's Southern cartographies. What Lewis Simpson calls O'Connor's "compelling aesthetic of revelation" eventually renders material, social geographies as irrelevant when compared to the "true country" of spiritual faith.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Uncreative Destruction: Inner-City Atlanta in Donald Windham's The Dog Star*

In 1998, as the hype surrounding *A Man in Full* went into overdrive (see the start of Chapter 9 for details), an advertisement in *Brightleaf* splashed the headline "Stop crying Wolfe...read the *other* novel about Atlanta." Surprisingly, the

advertisement was not referring to Margaret Mitchell's opus. Athens-based Hill Street Press was promoting its reprint of a book first published in 1950, Donald Windham's debut *The Dog Star*. Usurping *Gone with the Wind*'s status as the Atlanta novel was certainly an audacious promotional move. Unfortunately, Windham's own afterword to the new edition put things into a sobering historical perspective. Windham recalled that "[o]ne of my goals, of course, had been to portray Atlanta." However, when his publishers decided to concentrate promotional activities there, "[t]he reaction of the city that had loved *Gone with the Wind* did not increase Doubleday's enthusiasm." Moreover, Windham continues, "the next few times I visited the city, there was no copy in the Atlanta Carnegie Public Library." One of the obvious ironies of *Gone with the Wind* is that this epic expression of the capitalist New South Creed was published, and sold millions of copies, during the Depression. Yet the irony is redoubled when one considers that, despite actually depicting the depressed inner-city of the 1930s, *The Dog Star* completely failed to reconfigure the literary-cinematic image of Atlanta as a place of "magnolias and beautiful ladies" and/or the "*locus classicus* of the New South spirit."<sup>22</sup>

To be fair, the *Brightleaf* advertisement appears knowing in its irreverence. However, Hill Street's claim that *The Dog Star* is "a landmark classic of southern literature" (on the back cover) rather stretches the paratextual rhetoric. The reality is that there is not a single mention of Windham in monumentalising tomes like *The History of Southern Literature* (1985), and that not one critical essay about *The Dog Star* has appeared. Yet *The Dog Star* deserves serious reconsideration. I make this claim not only because the book challenged the narrative cartography of Atlanta popularised by Mitchell (and Selznick), but also because its representation

of inner-city poverty and urban redevelopment anticipates *Peachtree Road, A Man in Full* and *Those Bones Are Not My Child*.

*The Dog Star* opens with the teenage protagonist Blackie Pride returning to Atlanta. Blackie is fleeing the rural reform school where his best friend, Whitey Maddox, has just committed suicide. Back in the city, it soon becomes clear that Blackie is severely alienated from his family and friends. He has been changed utterly by his relationship with the anti-social but (apparently) strong and self-reliant Whitey. Arriving at his mother's house, Blackie recalls Whitey's maxim: "Home is the place where you don't feel at home" (12). Rejecting as sentimental the homesickness he felt while at the school, "now he felt as though the place he wanted to be no longer existed in the world" (13). Believing Whitey's "inheritance," a legacy of "strength and greatness and indifference," to be "his most important possession in the world" (45), Blackie mimics Whitey by ostracising himself from everyone he knows: "now he did not belong with them" (17). Having thus dispossessed himself from family and friends, Blackie self-consciously embarks upon a search for "Whitey's place in the city" (57). However, this search inevitably founders on the fact that Blackie associates Whitey with the County Farm School. Hence, "when he tried to imagine Whitey in the city the image faded, lost all its details" (56). Because "Whitey's place" can only be found within his own experience, eventually Blackie takes his "inheritance" to its grimly logical conclusion and, like Whitey, commits suicide.

The images I have invoked of Blackie's placelessness, homelessness and dispossession might locate *The Dog Star* in various ways. It may seem to be a novel "about the tragic alienation of youth," as Hill Street Press has (also) promoted the new edition. It might seem to be existential in the "vulgar" mode critiqued by



Edward Soja, “entrapped in pure contemplation of the isolated individual.” Or, if we locate Blackie’s “situation of being-in-the-world” within the social geography of Atlanta, *The Dog Star* may appear to be a neo-Agrarian indictment of urban life.<sup>23</sup> Yet as it turns out, neither the novel, nor its image of Atlanta, is quite this easy to situate. Without taking a neo-Agrarian tack, I *do* want to emphasise the socio-spatial (as opposed to adolescent or vulgarly existential) basis of Blackie’s alienation: his fractured familial and social life in inner-city Atlanta. We learn that Blackie’s father was “killed in a wreck as he started out on his first honest job” (27). Since then, Blackie’s alcoholic mother has vainly struggled to sustain the family in one of the “newer and cheaper houses” (9) located near the Techwood public housing project: the first of its kind in the United States, completed under the auspices of the New Deal in 1935. Blackie’s older sister Pearl, a single mother, is living in a duplex on Baker Street while “working as a waitress in one of those stands on Ponce de Leon” (11), and his younger brother Caleb is living with two old women who act as his foster parents. Significantly, the narrative suggests a similar socio-spatial basis for Whitey’s isolation. Whitey once told Blackie that “he never had felt attachment for his family,” recounting how, as a fourteen-year-old, he hitchhiked to California and back to Florida (55). I would suggest that part of Blackie’s tragedy is that, idealising his friend’s “strength and greatness and indifference,” he never really recognises the social background to Whitey’s suicide.

Rather than returning to school, Blackie resolves to find work in Atlanta in order to obtain “the space and freedom which money creates” (70). At this point, Windham introduces a narrative strategy that effectively emphasises the socio-spatial relations that delimit Blackie’s quest for “freedom,” his complete self-reliance in the idealised image of Whitey. Blackie “get[s] a job tearing down

houses" (104) for the Techwood renewal project. Pondering the contrast between his childhood summers in the park and "work[ing] all year round, like any man, twelve months a year," Blackie initially finds the idea "endless and fascinating" (105). However, soon after starting work at the demolition site, Blackie becomes alienated by and from the reality of manual labour. He observes one of his older workmates: "numb from the heavy work," the man's hands move "as though they were tongs." Worse, "[t]he houses were so old and rotten that they fell apart [...] during the morning a man's leg had been crushed beneath a roof which had fallen without warning" (107). Blackie revises his original idealism: the work has become "endless but not fascinating. There was no climax or satisfaction." (116).

Blackie decides to quit his job: the "space and freedom which money creates" has proven to be an illusion. Most obviously, full-time work only hinders his existential quest for total self-sufficiency: "the money made him no more able to pursue adventure as long as he was working." But it is also important that Blackie's labour involves the literal *destruction*, rather than the *creation*, of space. It is true that, by clearing free land for the construction of Techwood Homes, the wrecking company is involved in the social *reconstruction* of Atlanta. Moreover, as a public housing project funded by the federal government, this is not precisely the capitalistic "creative destruction" that David Harvey defines as typical of modernist urban development.<sup>24</sup> (As we shall see in Chapter 8, this New Deal scheme thus differs from the business-driven creative destruction--the so-called "urban renewal"--of Atlanta during and after the 1960s.) Nonetheless, division of labour dictates that Blackie is not involved in the constructive side of this socio-spatial process. Consequently, all sense of his own use-value, his productivity, is transferred to the cash nexus itself: "All he *made* was money" (123, my italics).

When the disillusioned Blackie decides to hand in his notice, the narrative pointedly segues Blackie's burgeoning nihilism with the destruction of Atlanta's historical geography:

He returned to work with a wild elation. All of the joy of destruction welled up in him. He stood on the floor beams of a second story pulling out a windowframe and [...] threw it with a joy of sheer energy down through the plaster ceiling below. Dry plaster and lathing exploded about the iron bar as it fell [...] giving him such pleasure to watch that he momentarily regretted being free of his job. But a few minutes before five he climbed down from his place and on the stroke of the hour he bolted.

(123)

The association between individual and social destruction serves to suggest that, for all his faith in economic "freedom," Blackie's social (and spatial) options are severely limited. This scene provides the socio-spatial context for Blackie's subsequent adoption of uncreative (self-) destruction as his way of being in--or against--the world.

Having quit his job, Blackie concentrates fully on living out his idealised image of Whitey's wilful isolation. In doing so, Blackie becomes more belligerently anti-social than ever. He estranges his older girlfriend, Mabel, and his oldest friends, Dusty and Hatchet. It is probably this pair and their accomplices who attack and seriously injure Blackie while he is walking down a street "unaware of the empty dirty city about him as though he were the center of a universe which moved as he moved" (165). Briefly, the attack actually dispossesses Blackie of his "inherited" image of Whitey. Blackie recognises and mourns his wilful isolation: "Why had he allowed himself to become helpless and alone?" Moreover,

having been numbed by and alienated from his manual labour at Techwood, the physical pain he now feels causes Blackie to repossess (or be repossessed by) his own body: "His body seemed the only thing in this world which was real and was his. He touched it gently, weeping for it, so innocent and so wronged" (169). However, Blackie suddenly realises that he has not been dispossessed of everything: he still has money (his wages from the Techwood job). Counting the bills, Blackie recovers his earlier belief that economic independence guarantees existential survival: "The forty dollars was all there [...] All his growing love and pity were metamorphosed instantly into bitterness and pride. He had triumphed over them after all" (170).

Blackie decides to use the money to get out of Atlanta altogether. However, economic "freedom" again proves to be a form of false consciousness. Blackie is drawn back to Atlanta because "[h]e was afraid that the sons of bitches would think that he had run out of town because he was afraid" (178). This spatial turn back to Atlanta may suggest that the social reality of inner-city life is inescapable, existentially or economically. Yet it is also notable that the narrative never invents the rural South as a sanctuary, as the agrarian antithesis of Atlanta. The County Farm School is less a "farmers' academy" (34), as Whitey once tried to dismiss it, than a strictly organised site of surveillance, discipline and punishment. During Blackie's initial escape from the County Farm School back to Atlanta, he passes through an anti-pastoral landscape of "gnarled and warped" branches, "withered sticks with poison" (8). Now, having left Atlanta again, Blackie finds himself in a rural hinterland that is "the forlorn midst of nowhere" (179). Blackie senses that "[h]e had been a fool to think that the world would be any different away from the city. The whole world was the same, the whole world" (180). These lines

might be read as the apotheosis of Blackie's universalised sense of displacement, his all-encompassing alienation. Yet the true tragedy may be that, for all inner-city Atlanta's grim social reality, it was at least the source of those social relations, the everyday love, that Blackie has sloughed off in order to honour Whitey's image. To this degree, *The Dog Star* anticipates (minus the religious overtones) O'Connor's stories of the 1950s: if Atlanta is no dream of Arcady, then neither is rural Georgia a neo-Agrarian utopia.

In a not entirely convincing coda to *The Dog Star*, Caleb Pride seems destined to follow the doomed path of both Blackie and Whitey. We see Caleb fleeing Atlanta like his brother before him. Disturbingly, the narrative seems inclined to naturalise social alienation and economic poverty: "[w]ith the rhythm of water and blood, of things which have happened countless times before and will happen countless times again," rain falls equally on Caleb and a "group of Negro children" who live on the border between Atlanta (Howell Mill Road) and the country. Yet there remains a twist: having "intended to run away, never return to the city," Caleb discovers that "the strangeness of the country frightened him." By returning to the city, Caleb may still be turning back to a fate like Blackie's. However, there also remains the possibility that Caleb may yet find succour, even salvation, in the kinds of social relations that Blackie so aggressively rejected: "He was lonely and he wanted comfort even if he had to return to the city where people did not understand" (220-221). It is the final torque to a novel that provides an unsparing portrait of poverty and alienation in Depression-era Atlanta, yet refuses to dismiss inner-city, everyday life in neo-Agrarian terms.

## II

### *The Emergence of the Postsouthern "International City"*

In the following chapters, I will want to argue that today's metropolitan Atlanta remains characterised by certain historical and narrative continuities with the imaginary cities of Scarlett O'Hara (the 1870s), Blackie Pride (the 1930s) and Mr and Nelson Head (the 1950s). However, I also want to suggest that it is useful to understand Atlanta's social, economic and spatial development since the 1960s in somewhat different terms. After 1961, boosters began to promote Atlanta as something more than the "New York of the South," or the capital of the "New South": now, they claimed, Atlanta was a "national city." Before the decade was out, Atlanta was being advertised as an "international city" and as "the World's Next Great City." In the second half of this chapter, I want to reconfigure Lewis Simpson's original, literary-historical notion of the postsouthern along economic and geographical lines to emphasise the capitalist logic behind the boosters' rhetorical and material reinvention of Atlanta as a "national" and "international" city.

In 1961, under the direction of its president, Ivan Allen, Jr. (appropriately enough, the son of the author of *Atlanta from the Ashes*), the Chamber of Commerce set out its grand vision of Atlanta as a "national city." This national identity was to be defined according to Atlanta's growing ability to exert "a powerful economic force far beyond its normal regional functions." In a related move that same year, the Chamber resurrected the "Forward Atlanta" campaign of the 1920s. This latest generation of Atlanta's private-public "power structure" (sociologist Floyd Hunter's famous term) were even more ambitious than Allen Sr. and his colleagues.<sup>25</sup> The Chamber hired a New York advertising agency to

orchestrate “Forward Atlanta II,” a campaign that was, as *National Geographic* later noted, a “spectacular success [in] selling Atlanta to the Nation as a good place to do business.” As *Atlanta Journal* editor Jack Spalding observed in 1965 (by which time Allen had been mayor for three years) the goal of the city’s civic-corporate leadership was to transform the provincial “Atlanta, Ga.” into national “Atlanta, U.S.A.” By 1959, over 400 of the top 500 largest American industrial corporations had located operations in Atlanta. According to the Chamber’s own purely economic criteria, such statistics confirmed Forward Atlanta II’s “spectacular success” in promoting—even inventing—the “national city.”<sup>26</sup>

Towards the end of the 1960s, the Chamber of Commerce began to advertise Atlanta as “The World’s Next Great City.” At times, such slogans seemed almost entirely rhetorical, little referring to any material reality. In 1971, Atlanta Airport was renamed Hartsfield *International* Airport on the tenuous basis that Eastern Airlines had established a connection to Mexico City. In 1977, a massive new convention centre situated downtown was named the Georgia *World* Congress Center (GWCC). If the local and the global were jarringly juxtaposed in the very name of the new complex, the city went further by locating GWCC on *International* Boulevard, formerly the rather more prosaic Cain Street.<sup>27</sup> Atlanta’s promoters were also quick to utilise a faddish neologism like “Sunbelt.” Urban historian David Goldfield remarks that “Sun Belt sophistry [...] has replaced the New South Creed as the prevailing rhetorical ruse in the region.” As a “useful case study” of just such “Sun Belt sophistry,” Bradley Rice identifies a campaign organised by the Metropolitan Atlanta Council for Economic Development (MACFED). Rice observes that:

If entrepreneurs were searching for the Sunbelt, Atlanta's promoters wanted them to find it in Georgia's capital city. One of MACFED's booklets crowed, "The Sun Belt, with Atlanta as its centerpiece, has surged into overwhelming economic significance." The booklet urged business people to "come find your place in the Sun Belt." An ad placed in numerous business-oriented periodicals carried on the theme, saying, "If you're looking for a place in the Sunbelt, you really can't afford to go anywhere else."<sup>28</sup>

One might say that terms like "Sunbelt" and "international city" epitomised the semiotic logic of late capitalism. Such seemingly abstracted language was inextricable from--was intended to facilitate--the material redevelopment of Atlanta as a centre of global finance and multinational corporate investment. As in the early 1960s, "economic force" remained the defining factor driving the boosters' rhetoric. Ultimately, the extravagantly named Georgia World Congress Center did help the city become a leading site for corporate conventions. The grandly titled Hartsfield International Airport did (eventually) establish Atlanta as an important node in the increasingly global network of commerce.

More generally, the influx of national and international capital did radically transform Atlanta's local, material geography. Atlanta was advertised as a prime investment site in the European business press, and boosters embarked on trade junkets to the commercial capitals of Europe and Asia. Such promotional manoeuvres helped ensure that the "mixed-use developments [MXDs] planned for downtown in the late 1960s and completed in the early 1970s" were often financed by *multinational* capital. To cite two telling examples, the Atlanta Center was funded by Kuwaiti petrodollars, while Tom Cousins' predictably named



Omni International--complete with an "international bazaar"--attracted substantial European investment. (The Omni will be central to my argument in Chapter 10.) As the dramatic redevelopment of Downtown and Midtown proceeded through international funding, so multinational corporations were increasingly the tenants of Atlanta's MXDs. The 1969 *National Geographic* article had emphasised the number of national businesses relocating to Atlanta. A follow-up feature in July 1988 noted that Atlanta "has become a top corporate-relocation center" for multinational corporations: "431 of the Fortune 500 industrial companies have offices in Atlanta, not to mention 134 firms from Japan." The global corporate reproduction of Atlanta's built geography was largely unaffected by the accession to local political power of black Atlantans, consolidated by Maynard Jackson's election as mayor in 1973. The new "urban regime" of white business interests and black political power continued to encourage Atlanta's burgeoning status as a site for multinational capitalist investment. This was especially the case during the 1981-1989 mayoral reign of Andrew Young--more about which follows in Chapter 8.<sup>29</sup>

However, dissenting voices emerged to challenge the boosters' master-narrative--what Rutheiser calls the "advertiser's monologue"--of a thriving "international city." It is possible to reconfigure critically the boosters' own "national" or "international" economic criteria so as to question why the local populace, even the local power structure, appears to be losing control of the city's built space. By the 1970s, as Truman Hartshorn observed in *Metropolis in Georgia: Atlanta's Rise as a Major Transaction Center* (1976), the city was becoming "less dependent on the state and region and more on national and global business." Even sources that usually served as the media for the boosters' message expressed

some concern. *Atlanta Magazine* was founded by the Chamber of Commerce in 1961, and soon attracted promising local writers like Pat Conroy and Anne Rivers (later Anne Rivers Siddons: see Chapter 8). Though the later, privately relaunched *Atlanta* remained “more celebrative than investigatory,” a 1981 article asked “Who Owns Atlanta?” The author, Neil Shister, noted that “most of the prime properties in town are controlled by interests head-quartered elsewhere: New York, Dallas, Boston, Toronto, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Al Kuwait.” The article concluded in terms that might have made Andrew Lytle say I told you so: “Atlanta has become a city owned by absentee landlords.” The perturbing (and rather less boostable) local economic realities that came with global investment in and ownership of Atlanta’s property and capital became starkly evident in the 1980s. In that decade, two of the city’s most established financial institutions and “major members of the downtown power structure,” Life of Georgia and the National Bank of Georgia, were bought out by Dutch and Saudi interests—even as twenty of the world’s largest banks were opening branches in Atlanta.<sup>30</sup>

And yet, the “international city” continues to be all too uncritically boosted. As Charles Rutheiser remarks: “To the imagineers at Central Atlanta Progress and the Chambers of Commerce, the activities and investments of foreign corporations are clearly the most important and easily demonstrable criterion of Atlanta’s global significance.” Rutheiser’s own *Imagineering Atlanta* (1996) is the most thoroughgoing narrative critique of “the politics of place in the city of dreams.” Not before time, Rutheiser introduced Atlanta into the interdisciplinary critical debate over the production of space under postmodern capitalism (see Chapter 2). Particularly useful is Rutheiser’s discussion of Peachtree Center, the core of the self-styled “private urban renewal program” through which John

Portman dominated the production of Atlanta's "new downtown" between 1959 and 1992. Rutheiser makes the basic but valuable point that Atlanta's Peachtree Center was the testing ground for Portman's trademark "'atrium' hotel that Fredric Jameson has taken as the hyperspatial totem of late capitalism." For Rutheiser, the effacement of "local cultural-historical context" from Peachtree Center's hermetic hyperspace results in "the apotheosis of contemporary Atlanta's generic urbanism and sense of placelessness." One might add that Peachtree Center also provides a telling example of the transition of Downtown Atlanta's development and ownership from the local to the global. Having been funded initially by the likes of Atlanta developer Ben Massell and the Texan real estate magnate Trammel Crow, Peachtree Center passed to lenders from New York and Japan when Portman went bankrupt in 1990. I will refer regularly to Portman's role in the capitalist production of Atlanta's social geography in Chapters 9 and 10.<sup>31</sup>

If it is true that Atlanta's "sense of placelessness" is related to the privatisation of Downtown's previously residential and public space, it becomes tempting to compare Atlanta with *non*-Southern cities: New York and, especially, Los Angeles, which not only Jameson has identified as the archetypal postmodern, capitalist city. The risk here is that, despite ostensibly offering an oppositional narrative, critics will merely parrot the boosters' performative affiliation of Atlanta with such "(inter)national cities." Of particular concern is the danger of repeating the boosters' rhetorical obfuscation of those local inequalities that still exist within Atlanta. While Rutheiser posits that Atlanta can be seen as "paradigmatic of ageographic and generic urbanism," he also insists that "Atlanta also represents a unique conjuncture of universals and particulars, and describes a reality quite

unlike New York or Los Angeles.” Rutheiser takes care to chart the specific, local character of residential spatial inequality in Atlanta, social realities that have been obscured by the narrative and material “imagineering” of a “national” and “international” commercial metropolis.<sup>32</sup>

Rutheiser also recognises that these local particulars are often “historical continuities.” To state it more directly: the racial segregation and economic uneven development that exists in contemporary Atlanta is not merely a postmodern, late capitalist phenomenon. It is often also the latest version of an established “Southern” system of socio-spatial inequality. Rutheiser’s phrase “Jim Crow in twentieth-first-century drag” seems rhetorically excessive, but metropolitan Atlanta’s *suburban* residential space is characterised by *re*segregation. A suburban area like Cobb County can seem “characteristically Southern” in the attitudes its white populace exhibits towards inner-city Atlanta. As whites have moved out in droves, into the previously rural heartland of Cobb, the population of the city of Atlanta has declined to less than 400,000, the clear majority of whom are poor African-Americans. Rutheiser notes that “[d]espite [...] the construction of a number of glitzy new mixed-use developments, such as John Portman’s Peachtree Center, white suburbanites [...] viewed the urban core in terms not too far removed from those used by Flannery O’Connor characters.” Another recent commentator, Peter Applebome, has suggested that Cobb is “the perfect distillation of the two trends driving American demography”: “suburbanization” and “Southernization.” Applebome is referring to the sheer growth of the suburban population in the South but, as his discussion of “Newtland” (Cobb County) reveals, the terms might also describe the (sub)urban reconstitution of characteristically Southern forms of racial segregation.<sup>33</sup>

In the 1980s and the 1990s, metropolitan Atlanta has experienced a further, *post*-suburban form of real estate development. Many neologisms were coined to define this new socio-spatial phenomenon, but journalist Joel Garreau popularised the term “edge city.” Garreau had, in fact, already discussed Atlanta in *The Nine Nations of North America* (1981). Garreau was so perturbed by the Omni International’s disorienting hyperspace--his experience eerily anticipates Jameson’s bewildered walkabout in Portman’s Bonaventure in Los Angeles--that he recited a familiar, small-town “sense of [...] knowing your place” that he hoped would redeem “Dixie” from the “Atlanta-ization of every comfortable town.” Yet just a decade later, Garreau was back in Atlanta reporting upon another radical reconfiguration of the city’s social geography. In his introduction to the bestselling *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (1991), Garreau posited that edge cities were nothing less than Americans’ “attempt at Utopia.” Supposedly, edge cities superseded both suburbanisation and “the malling of America” because “we have moved our means of creating wealth, the essence of urbanism--our jobs--out to where most of us have lived and shopped for two generations.” In this “restorative synthesis” of the urban, utilitarian Machine and the rural Garden--and of the homeplace, the marketplace and the workplace--Garreau optimistically envisioned a return to “our relationship to the land” and an opportunity to “reunite our fragmented universe.” In short, edge cities seemed to offer just the kind of sense of place that could curtail the Atlanta-ization of Dixie.<sup>34</sup>

However, Garreau’s utopian vision comes into conflict with the realities of race and class in Atlanta. Garreau identifies “four full-blown Edge Cities in the Atlanta area”: Perimeter Center, Midtown, Cumberland Mall-Galleria and Buckhead-Lenox Square Mall. He shows that, because all four of these edge cities

were built north of Downtown, and because the emerging black middle-class mostly resides in these edge cities (rather than, as in the past, in the urban core of the city of Atlanta itself), there has been a qualified erasure of “[p]sychological barriers long thought to separate Atlanta into the ‘white’ Northside and the ‘black’ Southside.” Garreau celebrates the significant economic progress of those middle-class Afro-Americans (whether Atlanta natives or not) who have sought “the white-collar jobs of high technology and the Fortune 500” with “corporations [which] tend to be headquartered in Edge City.” However, he also recognises that much of the city’s built space continues to be constructed along a very real “color line”: “you still get almost all the predominantly black [urban] neighborhoods over on the Southside.” What is more, Garreau and some of his interviewees are disturbed that, where *racial* segregation has been reduced by the growth of the black middle-class, it has simply been replaced by further *economic* segregation. Another “color line” is imposed: in the choice words of Stephen Suitts of the Southern Regional Council, “people are not judged by the color of their skins, but by the color of their money.” Ultimately, and rather ruefully, Garreau acknowledges that edge cities are less in the utopian American grain than historically continuous with the racial segregation and uneven development that has always characterised Atlanta.<sup>35</sup>

### *Getting Beyond Mitchell and O’Connor Country*

So how exactly have Southern novelists--and by extension, Southern literary critics--responded to the emergence of postsouthern, “international” Atlanta? And how has contemporary “Southern literature” depicted the local, “historical continuities” of racial segregation and economic uneven development? Flannery

O'Connor's representation of urban/suburban segregation remains resonant precisely because "beneath the shiny surface of the boosters' celestial Atlanta" there (still) exists "one of the poorest and most racially segregated central cities in the United States." However, since O'Connor's premature death in 1964, Atlanta has remained largely absent from Southern literature, and Southern literary criticism.<sup>36</sup>

Not surprisingly, Walker Percy offered some of the most acute observations on both Atlanta's redevelopment and the representational limits of "Southern literature." In 1978, Percy began an essay entitled "Going Back to Georgia" by noting the extent of change in the state capital, "especially if one had been used to the Atlanta of the 1930s." Percy intimated the extent to which this new metropolis challenged preconceived notions of Southern "place" when he mused: "You drive through Atlanta [...] and take a look around, and up, and you wonder, what is this place? Is this a place?" Like Rutheiser later, Percy identified contemporary Atlanta's sense of placelessness with mixed-use developments. Percy predicted that the "Atlanta of the Omni and the Peachtree Plaza" would become part of "an ever more prosperous Southern Rim stretching from coast to coast, an L.A.-Dallas-Atlanta axis." Of course, Percy was not wrong in predicting that "the Atlanta of the Omni" would be this Southern Rim's "media center." However, even Percy could never have foreseen that Ted Turner's CNN--initially dismissed as the "Chicken Noodle Network" but later transmitting across the globe from the Omni, now known as CNN Center--would expand far beyond the "Southern Rim" to guarantee "Atlanta's symbolic capital as a major city of global importance."<sup>37</sup>

Percy slyly registered his own distaste for Atlanta's transformation, and the civic-business boosterism that promoted and propelled it, in terms that echoed John Crowe Ransom: "I avoid the Chamber of Commerce word 'progress' because it does not do sufficient justice to the ambiguity of the change." Yet despite--or precisely because of--his personal distaste for the corporate cityscape, Percy recognised the need for a new literature to represent contemporary Atlanta. What is more, he insisted that Agrarian presumptions and prejudices should not burden this new literature. In "Novel Writing in an Apocalyptic Time" (1986), Percy "notice[d] a certain tentativeness in Southern fiction writers--as if they still had one foot in Faulkner country, in O'Connor country, but over there just beyond the interstate loom the gleaming high-rises of Atlanta." Percy hoped that the contemporary Southern novelist would "not try to become a neo-Agrarian" and avoid the challenge to represent this new built spatial form. But of course, Percy himself never wrote a *novel* about Atlanta. Indeed, when we recall how Percy performed Binx Bolling's retreat from the postsouthern suburbs of New Orleans, it is perhaps not surprising that he never turned his fictional attention to Atlanta. I have suggested that O'Connor's fiction enacts a leap of faith beyond material reality into the spiritual "true country." Similarly, Percy's dystopian vision of Atlanta's role in the "to me, not wholly desirable future of the region" is consistent with his Catholic metanarrative of civilisation's decline into an atheistic, even apocalyptic *post-modernity*.<sup>38</sup>

In 1972, the leading Southern literary critic C. Hugh Holman published an intriguing essay entitled "The View from the Regency Hyatt" (sic). In this pioneering piece, Holman anticipated many later critics by noting that, contrary to prior presumptions, there is no such thing as "a monolithic South." Holman's



essay was also important because it challenged, however delicately, the prevailing (neo-Agrarian) tendency to exclude “critical social realism” from the Southern literary canon. Yet when Holman introduced his titular, totemic image of contemporary Atlanta--John Portman’s first ever atrium hotel, the Hyatt Regency, completed in 1967--his argument becomes more complex. Toward the end of the essay, Holman asks “is the South as social subject any longer relevant?” Holman is really reworking that most hackneyed yet enduring of debates: is the South still distinctly different from the rest of the nation? Rather than directly answering this question, Holman asks another, and in doing so introduces the conundrum of contemporary Atlanta. He wonders: “Can one take the glass-enclosed elevator to the twenty-second floor of the Regency Hyatt in Atlanta and look out upon a world distinctively different from what he might see in New York, Chicago or Los Angeles?” As it turns out, the answer is provided not by Holman himself, but by the omnipresent doyen of Southern literary criticism. Holman writes: “As Louis Rubin pointed out to me, within two blocks of the Regency Hyatt you can find street evangelists extolling their primitive religions in tone and manner that make you think Hazel Motes of *Wise Blood* has come back to life.”<sup>39</sup>

Holman’s visual perspectives on Atlanta anticipate spatial theorist Michel de Certeau’s discussion of the contrasting views from the top and the bottom of New York’s World Trade Center. Invoking de Certeau’s terminology, one might say that the Southern literary critic resists the spectacle of the “panorama-city” by getting back “down below”: at street level, “the South” yet survives, in all its grotesque glory. But O’Connor might have been bemused to hear that, on his way to (possible) religious redemption, Hazel Motes saved “the South as social subject” from the spectre of capitalist Atlanta. More seriously, there is a lurking suspicion

that Holman--like Louis Rubin, but unlike Allen Tate (see Chapter 2)--is evading the *economic* reality of the South's radical redevelopment, so explicitly symbolised in the Hyatt Regency. Like Tate, Holman acknowledges that "to the extent to which the southern renaissance assumed such an agrarian way of life, that renaissance ended with the Second World War." However, by citing Atlanta's Haze-like evangelists alongside other familiar signifiers of regional identity, Holman reassures the reader that "the South" will survive--yet again. Having stepped tentatively into one of the gleaming high-rises of Atlanta, Holman finally seems more comfortable with his feet planted in O'Connor country.<sup>40</sup>

In a 1989 essay by another Southern literary critic, Julius Rowan Raper, Percy's clarion call for a more contemporary literary cartography was more clearly echoed. Having asserted that "our familiar place of red clay and mules, of piney hills [and] hamlets [...] is vanishing, even in our fiction," Raper proclaimed that "the skylines of Atlanta, even Durham, show us we are becoming the Postmodern South. Consequently, a Postmodern Southern Literature appears as inevitable as the movements that came before." Yet there remains a critical reluctance to look beyond "neo-Agrarian" notions of the Southern "sense of place." In his introduction to *The Future of Southern Letters* (1996), John Lowe posits that: "The rural past has been eclipsed by an ever-expanding urban present, centred on high-finance, high-tech wheeling-dealing, which takes place in high-rise postmodern skyscrapers, hub airports, and gigantic shopping malls." Contemporary Atlanta encompasses these three examples of "international" urban space. However, of all the essays included in *The Future of Southern Letters*, only Lowe's own interview with the poet Brenda Obsey refers directly to contemporary Atlanta. As a volume, *The Future of Southern Letters* is suggestive of how contemporary Southern writers and

critics have remained reluctant to extend O'Connor's proto-postsouthern scepticism toward the neo-Agrarian, literary-critical construction of Southern "place." Southern letters still tends to disregard present and "future" socio-spatial realities in nostalgic remembrance of place past.<sup>41</sup>

### *Representing the Postsouthern "International City"*

In this chapter, I have suggested that there are continuities between Atlanta's earlier attachment to the New South Creed, the "master myth of Atlanta history," and the city boosters' enthusiastic practice of "Sunbelt sophistry." However, rather than continuing to see post-1960s Atlanta as a "Sunbelt" or "New South" city, or even an agglomeration of "edge cities," in Chapters 8 to 10, I will use the term postsouthern "international city." As I noted in Chapter 2, terms like "Sunbelt" or "New South" (or "*New New South*") are boosters' buzzwords, and there is a risk of uncritically recapitulating such terms. Carl Abbott observes that "the idea of a Sunbelt allowed the South to escape its own history and to transform instantly from a 'backward' to a 'forward' region" (one recalls the New South philosophy of Scarlett O'Hara). Furthermore, "Sunbelt" fails (refuses) to convey the more troubling aspects of global capital's role in the radical reconstruction of Atlanta's local social geography. Of course, I am echoing another, Atlanta-specific promotional slogan. However, by putting quotation marks around "international city," and by prefacing it with "postsouthern," we can begin to interrogate the narrative representation (and material construction) of capitalist Atlanta. Moreover, if "*postsouthern*" signifies the postmodern, capitalist redevelopment of "the South," it also retains its etymological root: "Southern."

Thus, “postsouthern” may prudently remind us of the local, historical continuities that remain within the “international city.”<sup>42</sup>

I began this chapter by discussing Ellen Douglas’ reconception of “Sense of Place” through an eco-critical worldview. However, I have suggested that, in order to consider the socio-spatial reality of postsouthern “international” Atlanta, it is useful to adopt a rather different planetary perspective: capitalist globalisation. The contemporary “Southern writer” (and literary critic) might usefully practice what human geographer Doreen Massey has called a “global sense of place.” Such a perspective might help us to perceive and represent both the *local* and the *global* realities of contemporary Atlanta. We need to pay attention to both the bewildering effects of Atlanta’s precipitous rise to prominence as a hyperspatial hub within the matrix of global capital flows, and the local, material “geography of social relations” in which individuals practice their everyday lives. At the very least, the three novels discussed in Chapters 8 to 10 offer an excellent opportunity to consider how contemporary novelists *have* taken up the unenviable task of mapping the postsouthern “international city.”<sup>43</sup>

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Urban Renewal and Mixed-Use Developments: Place and Race in Anne Rivers Siddons' *Peachtree Road*

In his introduction to *The Future of Southern Letters* (1996), John Lowe advances his sceptical review of the Southern literary canon by introducing the “conundrum” of “[p]opular *women* writers.” Two non-canonical themes--Atlanta and popular Southern women’s writing--come together when Lowe references *Peachtree Road* (1988), a novel by “current holder of the ‘popular’ southern historical [fiction] crown,” Anne Rivers Siddons. By citing a “popular” Atlanta-based novel like *Peachtree Road*, Lowe’s revised map of Southern letters moves into rather daring territory. Yet this new critical cartography remains sketchy at best. Ultimately, Lowe’s introduction only highlights the fact that much as almost every other essay in *The Future of Southern Letters* ignores Atlanta (see Chapter 7), not one of the other contributors so much as mentions Siddons.<sup>1</sup>

Reviewing *Peachtree Road* at the time of its publication, Bob Summer was rather more willing to embrace Siddons’ novel as an example of “the future of Southern letters.” Indeed, Summer began his *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* review by referring to one (sadly anonymous) Southern literary critic who dared to follow Walker Percy by proposing contemporary Atlanta as the perfect subject for post-Southern Renaissance writers:

A couple of years ago, a leading critic of what is called Southern literature was asked at a literary symposium if there was anything in the South to write about that had not already been appropriated by William Faulkner,

Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty and other noted writers of previous generations.

Oh yes, he replied [...] Look at what happened in Atlanta since World War II and especially in the 1960s and '70s, the venerable critic admonished, a drama he contended surpassed Sherman's burning and the city's rebuilding. Yet he added, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* remains the Atlanta novel.

Fully a decade before the hullabaloo over Tom Wolfe's *A Man in Full*, Summer declared that, in *Peachtree Road*, Siddons had produced "the Atlanta novel for our time." In a similar vein, novelist and Atlanta native Pat Conroy termed *Peachtree Road* "The Southern novel for our generation."<sup>2</sup>

*Peachtree Road* charts the turbulent life of a rebellious Southern belle, Lucy Bondurant, as narrated by Lucy's cousin, Shephard Gibbs ("Gibby") Bondurant III. However, Summer's extravagant claims for *Peachtree Road* were largely based upon the impressive manner in which Siddons (like Mitchell in *Gone with the Wind*) also constructs a grand narrative of Atlanta's social development. The sweep of *Peachtree Road* is such that it maps the shift from the New South city of the 1930s to what I have defined as the postsouthern "international city"--the metropolis of multinational capital and mixed-used developments constructed between the 1960s and the 1980s. Siddons is not a postsouthern parodic writer in the manner of Percy or Ford: she does not deliberately set out to interrogate Southern literary-historical shibboleths such as "sense of place." Yet simply by focusing upon Atlanta, *Peachtree Road* (like *Gone with the Wind* before it) goes some way to challenging neo-Agrarian critical cartographies of Faulkner, O'Connor and Welty country.<sup>3</sup>

However, it is not the aim of this chapter to legitimise Siddons' "popular" novel as a suitably "literary" representation of Atlanta. Rather, I want to show how *Peachtree Road* constructs a certain idealised--and ideological--vision of the city's past. In a tenth anniversary foreword, Siddons explicitly eulogised the "short, supercharged decade of the Sixties" and celebrated the city of that time as "an Atlanta as surely gone with the wind as the one young Margaret Mitchell wrote of [...] but to me, no less beautiful and seductive than that one." The ideology underpinning this nostalgia can be traced through the text's detailed but *selective* rendering of Atlanta's actual redevelopment. I do not mean to insist that Siddons' historical novel must necessarily answer what Georg Lukács once called "[t]he question of historical truth in the artistic reflection of reality" by rigidly conforming to details of Atlanta's historical geography. Having said this, Siddons herself very clearly cleaves to "the mimetic-realistic impulse" of the traditional historical novel, despite what Fred Pfeil calls the "larger crisis of mimetic narrative and representation" that characterises a "new moment in capitalist culture." Because Siddons' "mimetic-realistic" text claims representational authenticity regarding recent Atlantan history and geography (be it through Siddons' own anniversary foreword, or through Gibby, who happens to be a published historian), one would do well to query such narrative authority. To put it another way: precisely because Siddons' (to cite Lukács again) "realistic, literary means of expression for portraying [the] spatio-temporal (i.e. historical) character of people and circumstances" is so closely related to actual people, events and places in Atlanta, it becomes possible to interrogate *Peachtree Road's* ideological bias. In what follows, I try to show how the novel's selective representation of Atlanta's (supposedly declining) "sense of place" between the early 1960s and the late 1980s

supports an idealised image of the white power structure that ruled the city during the 1960s. Ultimately, I want to situate *Peachtree Road* as an important textual map of Atlanta's postsouthern, multinational redevelopment, while simultaneously explicating the more problematic aspects of the novel's politics of place.<sup>4</sup>

## I

### *Place, Race and Real Estate: Buckhead and southeast Atlanta, 1961*

During his childhood, Gibby Bondurant is almost entirely confined to the wealthy, all-white enclave of Buckhead, in north Atlanta. As such, Gibby is utterly unaware of the economic, racial and spatial inequality that defines the city during the 1940s and 1950s. Even though the family's black servants populate young Gibby's narrow domestic geography, he grows up with an ideology of racial difference that ingenuously precludes economic class. He recalls that "I did not think of them as poor. I thought of them as Negroes. The one had nothing to do with the other" (26). Even during the occasional trip with the family servants to "pick up our laundry from Princess in Capitol Homes, or to fetch Amos from Pittsburgh, or Lottie, our cook, from Mechanicsville," he never really understands the chasmic contrast between the economic geographies of north and southeast Atlanta. Secure in his own secluded sense of place, young Gibby never ponders how the servants' everyday lives oscillate wildly back and forth across the color line of segregated Atlanta: "I got no sense, from these visits [to the southeast slums], that people really lived in those places. They were, instead, destinations that provided the great houses of Buckhead with their provender" (203). Though Gibby never knew it, Princess and Lottie lived out what bell hooks calls the "tension between service outside one's home [...] service provided to white folks"



and the “construction of a homeplace” of their own, “however fragile and tenuous.”<sup>5</sup>

As a young adult, Gibby does come to realise that the world of Buckhead’s white leisure-class is made by the labour of slum-dwelling black servants. However, it is not until December 1961, when Gibby takes another motorised tour of the city, that he is fully exposed to the exploitative nexus of place, race and real estate that inextricably connects the Bondurants with their servants, and Buckhead with southeast Atlanta. This time, Gibby travels not with Shem Cater (203), but with mayor-elect Ben Cameron and chauffeur Glenn Pickens, the son of the Cameron family’s own live-in servants. The mayoral limousine traverses the extremes of Atlanta’s unequal geography. Departing from Peachtree Road, the car passes first through downtown sites of white political and economic power--“Five Points, the epicenter of the business and financial district” (534) and Mitchell Street, where City Hall and the state capitol are situated (535). Only afterward do they enter the “the bowels of the city” (536): southeast Atlanta. Initially, Gibby is no more able to gain a visual “sense” of “those places” on the Southside than he was during his childhood visits. He recalls how “I had been down into the Southeast before, usually with Shem Cater in the Chrysler, to fetch or return one or another of my family’s servants, but to *my blind white eyes*, the streets on which the Negroes lived were much like the Negroes themselves: they all looked alike” (535, *my italics*). Having proceeded through slum neighbourhoods including “Summerhill, Peopletown, Joyland” (535), “Mechanicsville and Pittsburgh” (538), the tour terminates in Pumphouse Hill, a block of especially rundown tenements in Cabbagetown. At this point, Cameron discloses the devastating information that, unbeknown to Gibby, prompted the tour in the first place. The mayor-elect

tells Gibby that “[y]our family owns” Pumphouse Hill (541). Thus, Gibby finally learns and *sees* that his family’s privileged existence in Buckhead is built upon ground rent received from poor black Atlantans. Gibby’s mother Olivia—who has “let the money pour in” from Pumphouse Hill despite having “never put a penny of my capital into it”—is finally exposed (to Gibby at least) as an absentee landlord. Gibby’s (mind’s) eye still cannot quite perceive the tenants themselves. However, he can now trace the relation between the tenants’ abstract rent and the material construction of Olivia’s (his) own home. He can even map this nexus of place, race and real estate on to the makeup of his mother’s ostensibly “self-reliant” body—a body that suddenly reveals, to adapt Patricia Yaeger’s words, “the contradictions inherent in and hidden by elite southern space.” Gibby recalls that “I thought of [...] what the hopeless misery of those silent, invisible wretches in the cold beds of Pumphouse Hill had bought her, and how little of that misery would ever penetrate these creamy white walls, or her creamy white skin” (543).<sup>6</sup>

For his part, Ben Cameron has earmarked Gibby to take over the Bondurant family business and renovate the Pumphouse Hill property. Cameron has long since been telling Gibby that “real estate [is] an honorable way to make a living, and done right, a way to give back something back to the community” (276). Frank Bascombe might approve the sentiment. But beyond such platitudes, Cameron is also keenly aware of the wider political implications: by renovating Pumphouse Hill, Gibby might yet save a business-oriented city—and a Buckhead-based white power structure—imperilled by the prospect of racial and political unrest. It is, then, a tragic irony that Pumphouse Hill’s dilapidated tenements are set alight by arsonists on the very night of the limousine tour. Moreover, Olivia actually tells the assembled media that “[i]t’s not my property! [...] my son owns

it!" (545). Hence, Olivia's status as absentee landlord is never exposed to a wider public gaze, and it is Gibby himself who is branded a "Buckhead Slum Lord" by the *Atlanta Constitution*. Moreover, at this moment of crisis, Cameron explicitly states his primary obligation to the white power structure. He tells Gibby that "we're letting you hang" (rather than his mother, the supposedly honourable Southern belle) in order to save "[a]ll of us out here in Buckhead. To save Buckhead itself, and the way of life that's all we know" (548).

Through the tour from Peachtree Road to Pumphouse Hill, Siddons constructs a vivid narrative cartography of the racial segregation and economic uneven development that characterised Atlanta circa 1961. However, one needs to take note of the narrative twist whereby Cameron asks that Gibby accept his status as "Slum Lord" and social pariah. This twist will resurface in another telling and troubling turn to the novel's spatial (and racial) politics. But before that, the depiction of one black neighbourhood featured during the tour--Summerhill--begins to reveal problems with the text's politics of place.

#### *Place, Race and Urban Renewal: Summerhill, 1961-1966*

Reading *Peachtree Road* alongside non-fictional accounts of Atlanta, it soon becomes apparent that Siddons's Ben Cameron is, as Gary Pomerantz notes, "a thinly veiled version of Ivan Allen," the mayor of Atlanta between 1962 and 1970. Like Allen, Cameron takes office in 1962 having previously been vice-president and president of the city Chamber of Commerce. As I noted in Chapter 7, Allen instigated the Chamber's program to reinvent Atlanta as a "national city"; similarly, Cameron has formulated the "formal plan of growth and progress for the city that he felt would literally transform it into one of the country's great

urban centers" (386). Indeed, Cameron's "six-point program" is identical to the "Six-Point Plan" outlined by the Allen-led Chamber in 1961: "keep the public schools open, build a vast new network of local freeways, implement a new program of urban renewal, erect a world-class auditorium-coliseum and stadium, get a rapid-transit system rolling and tell the country about it in an ambitious, if chauvinistic, public relations effort called Forward Atlanta" (393). However, Siddons' fictional account is selective in its representation of the historical and geographical consequences of Allen's "Six-Point Plan"--particularly the harsh realities of "urban renewal." I want to begin considering the nexus of place, race and urban renewal in *Peachtree Road* by returning to the December 1961 limousine tour.<sup>7</sup>

As Glenn Pickens drives the limousine through Summerhill, Cameron "gesture[s] toward a nest of streets to the right" and informs Gibby that this is "where the new freeway will go through, and where the stadium will go, we hope" (537-38). Thus, three aspects of Cameron's "six-point program"--the proposals to construct freeways, "erect a world-class [...] stadium," and to "implement a new program of urban renewal"--coalesce in this corner of southeast Atlanta. However, when Gibby asks what will happen to the residents of the area, Cameron admits that it is a "[g]ood question. I'm sure they'd like to know the answer." Cameron soberly acknowledges that the redevelopment of Atlanta's urban space is inextricable from the racialised problem of residential displacement: "Holy Christ. We can raise eighteen million for a new stadium, and the housing authority can pledge fifty million to wipe out the slums in a decade, but they can't seem to relocate a single black family whose house they knock down." Cameron also implies that, during his mayoralty, urban planning policy

will be reformed to include resident relocation, neighbourhood renovation, and new public housing. Surveying Summerhill from the limousine, Cameron tells Gibby: "We've got to do better than this. We've got to do a lot better" (538). Yet when Cameron enters office only a month or so after the journey through Summerhill, any reference to the pernicious effects of the stadium's construction disappears from Gibby's narrative. This is notable because, during the Ivan Allen era, Atlanta Stadium was built adjacent to Summerhill, and "urban renewal" did, as Cameron anticipates, cause severe displacement of the local black population.

Geographer David Smith has observed that "[t]he strategy adopted by [Atlanta's] city government [...] involved more than urban renewal in the usual sense of specific projects designed to clear and/or rehabilitate areas of dilapidated housing." Atlanta's urban renewal program was ultimately intended to facilitate the private redevelopment of the declining central business district (C.B.D.). The destruction of mostly black residential neighbourhoods and the construction of Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium became part of this larger strategy. As Smith comments, "[t]he growing concentration of severely deprived people," mostly African-Americans, in the slums around the C.B.D. was perceived as "a threat both to existing capital investment and to the profitability of future development." Consequently, as political scientist Clarence Stone explains, "[o]ne of the main objectives of the city's renewal program [was] the creation of buffers between the city's commercial cores and nearby low-income residential areas." It was here that the value of an urban renewal "strategy [that] involved major public works projects associated with civic 'boosterism' [like] the Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium" emerged.<sup>8</sup> Stone emphasises that the stadium could "have been located elsewhere with less residential dislocation." However, it was deliberately designed

and situated as a “buffer” between the corporate real estate of Downtown and the surrounding poor slums (that is, those slums which survived outright demolition). In his memoirs, Ivan Allen describes how he decided that the stadium would be located at Washington-Rawson, an area “cleared of its decaying slum houses.” Allen recalled that there were “no immediate plans for use” of Washington-Rawson. In fact, the site remained unused because the mayor had made an agreement with “conservative businessmen” and “real estate interests” not to construct public housing on urban renewal land.<sup>9</sup>

By the time Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium was hastily completed in 1965, it had become more than just a “buffer” against the supposed threat that the slums posed to C.B.D. regeneration. Though the stadium itself was built on the Washington-Rawson site, further land was required for car parking, resulting in the displacement of no less than ten thousand of the 12,500 residents in nearby Summerhill. Such “urban renewal” of largely black neighbourhoods led critics to dub the policy “Negro removal.” Yet most critics accepted that, considered on their own terms, the slums deserved to be condemned.<sup>10</sup> As Smith notes, “[t]he basic problem was the failure to rehouse most of the people displaced by the renewal and redevelopment projects.” Between 1958 and 1968, as many as 75,000 black Atlantans were displaced from their homes. Between 1957 and 1967, 21,000 housing units were demolished in central Atlanta--yet only 5,000 new public housing units were constructed. Ivan Allen himself later observed that in Summerhill circa 1966, “[t]here were around ten thousand poor Negroes crammed into 354 acres.” Allen’s memoirs do not admit that the new stadium and parking lot had displaced thousands of these poor blacks. Instead, Allen blithely

claims that the stadium was “the single structure that signified our arrival as a national city.”<sup>11</sup>

The historical-geographical reality of “Negro removal” resulting from the construction of Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium is never represented explicitly in *Peachtree Road*. Instead, Gibby celebrates the stadium’s symbolic status in the development of the “major-league city”: “In Atlanta, we were almost precisely where Ben and the Club thought we should be. The new major league stadium was begun and built in a record fifty-one days, and the Milwaukee Braves became the Atlanta Braves, and the NFL Falcons came to town, and we played ball.” The fictional narrative echoes Allen’s memoirs even more closely when Gibby proudly recalls that, during the 1960s, Atlanta was “the second highest city in the country in terms of new construction” (634). Gibby subsequently launches into an admiring litany of the hotels, malls, office buildings, apartment houses, bars and restaurants built concurrently with the new stadium. Only when pausing to begin a new paragraph does Gibby mention that “Atlanta’s momentum did not come cheap. Near-riots simmered in the bright, hot days and the thick nights” (635).<sup>12</sup>

With this reference to “near-riots,” the historical-geographical relationship between “urban renewal” and “Negro removal” makes a subterranean reappearance in Gibby’s narrative, for Siddons once more seems to base the relevant fictional scene upon an incident from the Allen era. As Charles Rutheiser recounts, “[i]n the summer of 1966, anger with ‘negro removal’ and the slow pace of replacement housing construction sparked a number of civil disturbances in the area around the stadium.” These protests came to a head on September 6, 1966, when a white policeman shot a black robbery suspect in Summerhill. The local population, galvanised by S.N.C.C. (the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating

Committee), gathered to protest at the highly symbolic stadium site. Mayor Allen went to the scene to appeal for calm, was “rocked off the top of a police car as he tried to address the crowd,” and eventually “instructed the police to use tear gas.”<sup>13</sup>

This is how *Peachtree Road* re-presents this fraught historical moment:

During one particularly spectacular confrontation he [Mayor Cameron] climbed atop a parked car, a surging sea of angry, frustrated black faces at his feet, his coppery head a target for any murderous fool within a mile radius, and pleaded through a borrowed bullhorn for order. He finally got it--and his photograph in the newspapers of an entire nation--before he was toppled from the car and ended up in Piedmont Emergency with a sprained ankle and a hole in the seat of his pants. But Atlanta did not blossom into flames as Detroit and Watts and Pittsburgh did in those summers, and as Ben himself said, that was worth a considerable chunk of a mayor's ass. (635)

The novel briefly recapitulates the same scene on two other occasions (93, 270). Yet Gibby never explains *why* black Atlantans are protesting, or suggests that the residents of Summerhill had good reason to be aggrieved. As such, *Peachtree Road* elides the historical role that, as Frederick Allen puts it, “his [Mayor Allen's] new stadium might have played in triggering the unrest in Summerhill.” Indeed, the novel does not actually locate the “near-riot” in Summerhill. Gibby's most substantial account of the scene is undated and unlocated (634-35); on one of the two other occasions, he recalls that the mayor “stood atop an automobile in Mechanicsville” (270). By fictionally “displacing” Cameron and the “surging sea of angry, frustrated black faces” from Summerhill, *Peachtree Road* further mystifies



the problematic relationship between the fictional scene and the historical incident. Moreover, this displacement obscures the dramatic and historical irony of Cameron's words, "[w]e've got to do better than this"--declared while driving through Summerhill, past the prospective site of the stadium, in 1961. In reality, by proceeding with the construction of the stadium at the direct expense of Summerhill, and by failing to provide sufficient replacement housing, the mayor of Atlanta failed to "do a lot better" by poor black Atlantans. To the extent that *Peachtree Road* suggests that the mayor single-handedly averted Atlanta's racial (and spatial) problems, Siddons seems to be producing--to cite Fredric Jameson's formulation--symbolic resolutions to real historical (-geographical) problems.<sup>14</sup>

Certainly, *Peachtree Road's* depiction of Cameron's actions during the "spectacular confrontation" captures the personal bravery (or folly) of Allen's foray into Summerhill. The local SNCC activist Hosea Williams later recalled that, "I couldn't believe some white man had that nerve [...] He [Allen] had the guts of a lion." However, the implication that the mayor's actions alone prevented Watts-style rioting is the apogee (or nadir) of the novel's hagiographic image of Allen. Indeed, the narrative emphasis on the mayor's heroics, rather than on the "urban spectacle" enacted by the "angry, frustrated" black residents, recalls Lukács' critique of "the Romantic practice [...] of placing 'great men' at the centre of [...] historic portrayals and of characterising them by means of historically attested [...] anecdotes." As the novel's representation of the "near-riot" narrows into a repeated anecdote about the mayor's heroism, the reality of "Negro removal" is further obscured. Ultimately, the historical, material consequences of "rais[ing] eighteen million for a new stadium" and razing a black neighbourhood are erased from *Peachtree Road*.<sup>15</sup>

## II

### *Place, Race and the "International City": Buckhead, 1970s-1980s*

Throughout *Peachtree Road*, Gibby regularly turns his disapproving gaze upon the corporate capitalist cityscape of contemporary (i.e., late 1980s) Atlanta. Early on, Gibby observes pithily that "[s]ome of our downtown and midtown structures [...] are very tall. That, to my eye, is all they are: tall." Gibby's dystopian view of the contemporary "megapolis" gains particular intensity because the "towers of commerce that have made us the hub of the Sunbelt" (7) are no longer restricted to downtown. Gibby's beloved Buckhead has also become a prime site for commercial development.

Early on, Gibby observes that "Buckhead has always been known, proudly, as the wealthiest unincorporated suburb in America." In fact, Buckhead was officially incorporated to the city of Atlanta in 1952, and Gibby observes that this "remains to many Buckheaders still alive a catastrophe of only slightly less magnitude than the one wrought by General Sherman" (49). Yet it is clear that, from Gibby's perspective, the "catastrophe" of 1952 is as nothing compared to what one might call Buckhead's incorporation to the "international city." Worse, to be incorporated into/by the spatial logic of multinational capital is also to be creatively destroyed. Gibby provides a vivid sketch of developers' scorched earth policy towards residential Buckhead and its radical reconstruction as an edge city:<sup>16</sup>

along Peachtree Road itself [...] the fine old houses of my youth stood empty or were coming down, falling to prissy, ridiculous, and hugely expensive, ersatz Federal "townehomes" or thrusting glass condominium

towers; to thirty- and forty- story office towers and hotels and great “mixed-use” developments [...] To the north, out Peachtree Road into and past Brookhaven [...] another mini city like the one in midtown was rising, its towers squeezed onto land that went, in some instances, for \$3 million an acre. (726-727)

The creative destruction of Buckhead’s built space by “the Arabs and the Lebanese and the Japanese and Germans and South Americans”—not to mention the “Yankees” (728)—is so voracious that Gibby finds the Bondurant house itself under siege. He observes that “only a scant square block of Peachtree Road where my own home stood was still inhabited by the old houses and their original families. Past us toward downtown not another private home stood” (727). Gibby learns from Carter Rawson, fellow former “Buckhead Boy” turned world-famous real estate developer, just how zealously national and international speculators have sought his property: “Everybody with any money in all fifty states and about ten countries has been after your place” (757).

In Chapter 3, we saw how Percy’s Binx Bolling searches for a metaphysical “spirit-presence of place” that might offer refuge from the proliferation of postsouthern suburbia. Similarly, Gibby Bondurant strives to salvage the mystical “place-magic” (“mine from birth”) of residential Buckhead (57). Binx found sanctuary in New Orleans’ Garden District; Gibby has been ensconced in the summerhouse at 2500 Peachtree Road since the “Slum Lord” scandal of 1961. But whereas the Garden District circa 1960 remained relatively untouched by real estate development, 1980s Buckhead’s *metaphysical* “place-magic” is being *materially* transformed. Hence, as much as Gibby clings to the “scant square block of Peachtree Road,” he also retreats into a *mental* space: the 1940s/1950s Buckhead

of his youth. He dismisses the new “business district” by focusing his mind’s eye upon the old “residential Buckhead [...] insulated from the sweat, smells and cacophony of the city proper, to the south, by layers of money.” For Gibby, this exclusive enclave, not the corporate, convention-centred Downtown, was (is) the authentic Atlanta: “Visitors visit on Peachtree Street. Atlanta lives--or did--on and just off Peachtree Road” (32-33).

Gibby’s mental map is most vividly illustrated when he recounts his nightly “run[s] through a landscape that existed forty-odd years ago” (39). During these jogs, Gibby envisions “my own personal Buckhead” by “see[ing] it now through the scrim of childhood” (33). This is an ingenuous point of view in that it allows Gibby to elide his earlier epiphany: that the domestic leisure of Buckhead’s white elite was built upon the labour and rent capital of black Atlantans. Now, rather than recalling the nexus of place, race and real estate between Buckhead and southeast Atlanta, Gibby fuzzily invokes “the children in my crowd” following the black “gardeners and yardsmen of all these old estates” (40). His mind’s eye envisions “running through the dazzling shower from the hose held by Leroy Pickens, the Camerons’ driver.” Yet Gibby cannot entirely avert his gaze, or his narrative, from either the (literal) signs of land speculation--“I do not see the Sotheby and Harry Norman and Buckhead Brokers signs” (41)--or the material reality of the buildings themselves. He observes ruefully “the monolithic and hideous Buckhead Plaza is going up now (unseen, unseen!)” (47).

Clearly, Gibby is scathingly critical of the creative destruction of Atlanta, and especially of residential Buckhead. However, his powerful critique of multinational capitalist redevelopment is premised upon a highly selective nostalgia for that era when Atlanta was ruled by “Ben Cameron and his tough,

aristocratic new power structure" (393)—a time when Buckhead was still the white elite's residential base. This bias informs Gibby's reluctance to admit any "historical continuities" between the white power structure's invention of a "national city" in the 1960s, and the production of the "international" (i.e., *multinational corporate*) Atlanta of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>17</sup>

Rutheiser describes how "[t]he wave [of real estate development in Buckhead] turned into a flood following the city's annexation of Buckhead in 1952 [...] a number of the city's major downtown developers assembled large tracts of land for subdivisions, commercial strips, and shopping malls." Evidently, Buckhead's residents had reason to regret the "catastrophe" of 1952. However, the pace and national (corporate economic) scope of creative destruction really increased during the 1960s, when Buckhead "was overwhelmed by [...] strip, community, regional, and super-regional shopping centers." In that decade, records Rutheiser, "local developers in league with national partners built the first office buildings and mixed-use developments along Peachtree and Piedmont Roads." Yet Gibby never mentions any commercial construction in Buckhead *after* Lenox Square Mall, built in 1959 (476), and *before* those hateful "office towers and [...] 'mixed-use' developments" erected during the 1970s and 1980s. In other words, his narrative never suggests that residential Buckhead was *already* being massively redeveloped *during* the "Ben Cameron" era.<sup>18</sup>

By neglecting to depict the commercialisation of residential Buckhead during the 1960s, Siddons is able to maintain *Peachtree Road's* idealised image of Cameron, the Buckhead-based white power structure, and residential Buckhead itself. Instead, Gibby's (decline) narrative emphasises the creative destruction of residential Buckhead during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Gibby explicitly

attributes the decline of his Northside neighbourhood to the political downfall of the white power structure. He complains that “the city had eaten Buckhead”—“ever since the decade of Ben and the Club had ended [...] and the political and economic base and mix of the city had changed” (728). This implication that Buckhead’s radical reconstruction is entirely attributable to a *post*-1960s power structure comprised of black, local politicians and global capital is another manifestation of *Peachtree Road*’s ideological bias towards the white power structure of 1960s Atlanta.

Gibby observes that “[t]he city Ben Cameron had left behind him [...] was a city of severely curtailed white influence, aristocratic or otherwise.” Come the late 1970s, the scions of the white power structure, the “Buckhead Boys” of his own generation, are “by no means the only money in town now, or even the most substantial.” This is not only because the economic influence of the Buckhead elite has been superseded by national and global capital. It is also because “political power and governmental influence” (729) has passed to black Atlantans. The black mayor of 1980s Atlanta is none other than Glenn Pickens, the son of the Cameron family’s live-in servants and the man who chauffeured Gibby and the mayor-elect in December 1961. Over twenty years later, Pickens is “proving to be a very good mayor indeed [...] an international mayor for an international city.” Gibby’s words of praise may suggest that Mayor Pickens and contemporary Atlanta gloriously fulfil the “international” rhetoric first deployed by Atlanta’s civic boosters in the 1960s. However, Pickens is seen by the old white power structure as “far too inclined to advocate the razing of the city’s old homes and businesses to accommodate the inexorable mercenary army of high rises marching north out Peachtree Road” (752). Such is the ill feeling among certain members of

the old elite that they see Pickens not as “an international mayor for an international city” but as “Ben Cameron’s chauffeur boy” (753).

Gibby is quick to distance himself from such overtly racist views. He also acknowledges that “the fabled Club of the Sixties [...] would be the first to acknowledge [that they had] been dethroned by the very people they sought to attract--and also those they did not: the businessmen of the world and the concerted Atlanta black community” (751-752). At such points, as Summer notes, Gibby “retains an ambivalence that enhances his narrator’s voice with a perceptive credibility.” Gibby even speculates that, if mentally fit, Cameron himself might have found post-1960s Atlanta’s “transformation exhilarating” (728).<sup>21</sup> Yet such moments of ambivalence are isolated. Generally, Gibby expresses agreement with the old Buckhead elite’s dim view of Atlanta’s latest reconstruction: “I *was* glad that he [Cameron] could not see the physical changes in his city” (753). Gibby recites a series of binary oppositions that rhetorically distinguish Ben Cameron’s “real city” from Glenn Pickens’ “international city”: youth/arrogance, energy/uproar, ambition/venality (394). Gibby also posits that Pickens’ “megapolis” no longer provides the ordered, total sense of place that the white power structure’s political and economic preeminence (supposedly) guaranteed. He claims that “[i]t would not be a city of unity and purpose and wholeness of ethos that he [Pickens] straddled. Atlanta was too big for that now, too fragmented, too much a city of parts and factions and interests.” Though Gibby justifiably points to suburban white flight as evidence of contemporary Atlanta’s racial disunity, he is once again forgetting that 1960s Atlanta, if not so sprawling, was similarly “fragmented” by inequality. Most provocatively of all, Gibby suggests that “in the city proper, the blacks who were left did not move

with one body, mind and voice, as Ben and the Club had done, but snarled and jostled in warring packs" (730). To be sure, Gibby believes that Pickens *will* bring political cohesion to this concrete jungle--but only because the current mayor was "groomed by Ben Cameron" (730). As we shall see, this is merely a portent of the paternalistic power relationship that Siddons constructs between Cameron and his protégé--a relationship that plots the final twist in *Peachtree Road's* politics of place.

By presiding over and actively encouraging the multinational capitalist redevelopment of Atlanta in the 1980s, the fictional Pickens approximates Andrew Young, the former civil rights activist who became mayor of Atlanta between 1982 and 1990. Young was heavily criticised for sanctioning the razing of historical buildings. He famously dismissed one old house that had become a focus for preservationists as a "hunk of junk," and argued that "Atlanta has no character, we are building it now." Young's anti-preservation policy was partly motivated by the belief that "Atlanta's historical buildings were inimically bound up with the history of racialized inequality and that to preserve them was to somehow preserve and legitimate the memories of those times along with those places." However, as part of his "unashamedly Reaganite vision of trickle-down economics," Young also encouraged corporate real estate development and "gutted neighborhood participation in the planning process." One critic commented that Young "never met a building permit he didn't like," and city hall issued 20,000 building permits within three years of Young becoming mayor.<sup>21</sup>

It is therefore noteworthy when *Peachtree Road* enacts a *departure* from Pickens' fictional image of Young. Gibby discovers that the mayor is *preventing* the razing of the Bondurant house through unique zoning restrictions. However, Pickens is not doing this because he personally wants to protect what remains of



white, residential Buckhead from multinational development. Indeed, the mayor warns Gibby: "Ben Cameron was able to save your asses out in Buckhead until he got sick [...] I'm not in the business of saving Buckhead asses." Pickens zones the Bondurant house only because Cameron wanted Gibby to receive belated compensation for his role as patsy in the 1961 "Slum Lord" scandal. Pickens explains to Gibby that "[t]he city owes you. You took a bad beating back then after the fire [...] So this is an old debt. But don't thank me, because it's Ben Cameron you owe, not me" (760). *Peachtree Road* thus presents the preservation of Gibby's family home not as a benevolent gesture by Mayor Pickens, but as a final heroic flourish from ex-mayor Cameron. In order to celebrate Cameron this one last time, the narrative foregrounds the troubling paternalistic relationship between Cameron and Pickens--troubling not only in the superficial sense that it seems a misleading fictional "reflection" of Andrew Young.<sup>22</sup> The paternalistic nature of Pickens's ascension to political office becomes apparent when the black mayor explains to Gibby just why he is willing to enforce zoning restrictions around 2500 Peachtree Road:

I owe him [Ben Cameron] as much as you do. If I didn't, Buckhead would be solid high rise right now. You think your tax base is anything like what I could make for this city out of that residential real estate out there? No, Ben took me aside when I was getting ready to graduate from high school and said he'd pay my way through college and law school, and take care of my dad for the rest of his life, and he'd make me mayor one day, if I'd do everything he said to, because we were going to have a black mayor as sure as gun's iron, and it ought to be somebody like me [...] And in exchange for

all that, I was to spare this little hunk of Buckhead real estate that his and your houses sat on when the developers got after it. (760-61)

Because ex-mayor Cameron is the real force behind the preservation of the Bondurant house, it also serves to emphasise that, in contrast, Mayor Pickens is (by his own admission) politically responsible for Buckhead's transformation from "residential real estate" to "solid high rise." Ultimately, Cameron's insistence that Pickens spares "this little hunk of Buckhead real estate" is not only figured as a favour on behalf of the long-suffering Gibby. It is transfigured into the ex-mayor's heroic last stand against the redevelopment of the white power structure's traditional homeplace--a final act of resistance against the present black mayor's pro-development policy.<sup>23</sup>

Toward the end of the novel, while on the way to Lucy's funeral in Oakland Cemetery, Gibby tells Ben's wife Dorothy Cameron that the "preposterous sunstruck towers" of Downtown "might as well be the back of the moon to me" (748-749). It is appropriate that Gibby uses the same lunar spatial metaphor to describe late 1980s Downtown that, circa 1961, he used to describe Cabbagetown: "This was literally [*si*] the back of the moon to me" (539). For ultimately, both of these built landscapes--the slums of the 1960s and the "international city" of the 1980s--are incomprehensible to Gibby. This may be why Gibby never identifies the *similarity* between the creative destruction of poor, black Summerhill, and the creative destruction of rich, white Buckhead. In the narrative's present, Gibby seems to have regressed into the state of ignorance that he exhibited before the limousine tour of 1961. He admits that he has "not seen [Pumphouse Hill] since a bitter cold day more than twenty-five years ago" (6): the day that he discovered the nexus of place, race and real estate between north and southeast Atlanta.

During the 1980s, Gibby is so preoccupied with the razing of residential Buckhead that he shows no awareness that poverty-stricken, black inner-city neighbourhoods *still* exist within the “international city.” In the narrative’s present, Gibby is flirting with a sense of place that will allow him to escape “international” Atlanta altogether. He envisions joining Lucy among the “ordered world” of “Atlanta’s favored dead” at Oakland Cemetery--the one place where “Old Atlanta” has kept at bay the “trash and tackpots” (4-5).<sup>24</sup>

### III

#### *A Palimpsestuous Postscript: Downtown*

Siddons’ ideological affiliation with the white power structure of 1960s Atlanta was made explicit in an essay published in the same year as *Peachtree Road*. In “The Maturing of a City: Atlanta Comes of Age” (1988), Siddons recalled the 1960s from the perspective of her time as a writer and editor for *Atlanta* magazine. She asserts that “Ivan Allen shone over those days like a young sun and was the spokesman for a decade and a generation,” and recounts the time when the mayor “stood atop a car during an incipient riot in the black Summerhill neighborhood before he was toppled, talking, talking.” As Phil Garner critically observed in (of all places) *Atlanta*, “Maturing of a City” extends in “nonfiction form” *Peachtree Road*’s celebratory “central image” of the white power structure.<sup>25</sup>

The reference to *Atlanta* magazine in “Maturing of a City” also recalls the Prologue to *Peachtree Road*, where Gibby Bondurant quotes verbatim an article published in one “*Cityscope* magazine.” *Cityscope*’s female journalist breathlessly depicts “the power structure of that youngest and least typical Southern city, the movers and shakers, the ‘club’” who took Atlanta “to the brink of [...] ‘the next great international

city' ” (13-15; italics in original). It is possible that, in the figure of the “intense female journalist, who was not one of us [the Buckhead elite] but would have died to be,” Siddons signals and even satirises both her ideological affinity with the white power structure, and her background as a journalist-cum-booster for *Atlanta*. Yet it is telling that, though Gibby regards the *Cityscope* article as “overheated and romantic in the extreme,” he also believes it encapsulates “a kind of oversimplified truth” (13). Indeed, Gibby’s own narrative, with its hagiographic nostalgia for the “white power structure,” can be seen as an epic extension of the *Cityscope* feature.<sup>26</sup>

Extending the surreal intra-textuality of Siddons’ work, “The Maturing of a City” actually quotes well-nigh verbatim numerous passages from Gibby’s narrative in *Peachtree Road*. This bizarre self-plagiarism went even further in *Downtown* (1995). In this novel, Smoky O’Donnell, a former journalist for Atlanta’s Chamber of Commerce magazine *Downtown*, quite literally rewrites Gibby’s hagiography of Cameron and the Buckhead elite. When Smoky recounts her first encounter with “the legendary Ben Cameron, mayor of Atlanta” and his colleagues at the Commerce Club, she declares without a trace of irony that “[i]n that moment I fell in love with the power structure of the city.”<sup>27</sup> The text also reproduces one of the booster-like litanies that appears in both *Peachtree Road* and “The Maturing of a City” as Smokey’s ode to Old Atlanta (75). Come *Downtown*, the language of Siddons and her character-narrators has become increasingly indistinguishable, even integrated with the “international” capitalist rhetoric of the city boosters themselves.

Most disturbing, though, is *Downtown*’s (double-) take on the nexus of place, race and real estate in 1960s Atlanta. In 1967, Smoky joins photographer Lucas

Geary for her first trip into southeast Atlanta. Smoky and Geary take the same geographical--and narrative--route that Gibby, Cameron and Pickens took in 1961. This time, it is Geary rather than Cameron who astonishes the narrator with his knowledge of "the geography and ethnology of these dismal black habitats" (167). However, southeast Atlanta's "geography and ethnology" radically altered between December 1961 and the summer of 1967. When mayor-elect Cameron "gestured toward a nest of streets to the right" in 1961, Gibby gazed upon "miserable little houses" (537). When Geary "gestured to the right" in 1967, Smoky "caught a glimpse of the blue bowl of the new stadium." Linguistically, there are only slight differences between what Cameron and Geary say while passing through Summerhill--most obviously, in grammatical tense. However, in historical-geographical terms, these shifts have significant semantic ramifications. Whereas Gibby asked Cameron "[w]here will those people go?" (538), Smoky asks Geary "[w]here did the people go?" (168). In 1961, Cameron admitted that the stadium would be built on the site of a black neighbourhood, but that he had no idea where the residents who lived on the site would be relocated. In 1967, Geary, repeating Cameron's words almost exactly but in the past tense, is unable to say what did happen to the displaced residents.

Geary does refer to a mayoral initiative to construct new public housing and regenerate those communities that have survived: "Ben Cameron has started, but it's going to take way too long." Yet even after the Summerhill riot of September 1966, the Allen administration's "post-protest goals"--"neighbourhood improvements" and "an adequate supply of new low- and moderate-income housing"--faltered. In November 1966, the mayor appointed a Housing Resources Committee to oversee the construction of 17,000 new units of public housing

over the next five years. Allen also included Summerhill--indeed, the entire Southside--in the federally funded Model Cities scheme. However, once "the threat of civil disorder receded," and influenced by "worries in the business community that subsidized housing would serve as a magnet for the poor and hasten the day that Atlanta would become a black majority city," the Allen administration returned to its pre-1966 policy. Only a few public housing units were built in Peopletown. As such--and to answer Smoky's question, "Where did the people go?"--southeast Atlanta's displaced persons continued to gravitate towards the remaining, overcrowded slums. The result was that "conditions in the Model Cities zone deteriorated further."<sup>28</sup>

It is also telling that the garrulous Geary never mentions the riots of September 1966, even though he and Smoky are driving through Summerhill in the summer of 1967. Geary observes that "Atlanta's going to be lucky if somebody doesn't literally light a fire under it this summer" (168), yet overlooks the historical riots in Summerhill *last* summer. *Downtown* does invoke the real "near-riot" when Smoky recapitulates *Peachtree Road's* anecdote about the mayor's heroism. This time, the incident is at last (as it never is in *Peachtree Road*) located in Summerhill, yet even now Smoky refers to a "past incendiary summer" (179), rather than the *last* incendiary summer. To further mystify matters, Smoky's sometime paramour, Brad Hunt, situates what is apparently the same incident "down in Vine City a few years ago" (141). Finally then, *Downtown's* "palimpsestous" relation to *Peachtree Road* only reveals more of the historical-geographical lacunae lurking within Siddons' (meta)narrative cartography of Atlanta.<sup>29</sup>

In 1998, Anne Rivers Siddons moved away from Atlanta. She explained to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* that “Atlanta had a very specific feel to it in the 60s. It doesn’t have that feel anymore.” For Siddons, Atlanta had lost its sense of place because “[a]nything at all left of what the city was when it was neighborhoods has been torn down.” Symbolically enough, developer Blaine Kelley had recently submitted an application for permission to raze the 1924 Georgian Revival house that had served as Siddons’ model for the Bondurant mansion in *Peachtree Road*. Kelley planned to build condominiums on the site. Siddons moved to Charleston because, she said, “more historic buildings have been saved here [Charleston] than in any other big city. And here they celebrate the past. They don’t pretend it never happened.” That prototypical Atlanta land speculator Scarlett O’Hara would have disapproved of Siddons’ gravitation towards those “boring” Old South cities, Charleston and Savannah. Gibby Bondurant, though, would understand.<sup>30</sup>

## CHAPTER NINE

### Placing the Postsouthern “International City”: Tom Wolfe’s *A Man in Full*

The publication of Tom Wolfe’s *A Man in Full* in November 1998 focused attention upon Atlanta as Anne Rivers Siddons’ *Peachtree Road*, for all its popularity, never did—indeed, as no novel had since *Gone with the Wind*. A little over ten years earlier, Wolfe’s ambitious and commercially successful debut novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987) had been heralded for its “brilliant evocation of New York’s class, racial and political structure in the 1980s.” When news emerged that Wolfe’s long-awaited follow-up would similarly analyse the social forces at work in Atlanta, and that the U.S. hardback first edition print run would be 1.2 million copies, there was a sense that this was more than a merely literary phenomenon. *A Man in Full* was a cultural and economic event, and nowhere more so than in Atlanta itself.<sup>1</sup>

At one level, *A Man in Full* became prime cultural capital: local boosters saw the novel as a tool to promote tourism and their own image of the “international city.” Despite pre-publication rumblings about the novel’s controversial contents, the Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau invited the author to breakfast because “[w]e have a cultural tourism initiative in this city [and w]e feel Tom Wolfe is certainly a major novelist with a blockbuster book coming out this fall.” As an example of how “[c]ultural tourism [was] winning out over a self-conscious image” in Atlanta, more than one booster noted how Savannah residents “forgot all the anger” towards John Berendt’s *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (1994) when “they saw how much tourism they were getting.” As sociologist of the South John



Shelton Reed observed, *this* was “the old Atlanta spirit!” Nor did it go unnoticed that Wolfe had turned his fictional focus upon Atlanta after his big book about New York, *the* “global city” and Atlanta’s supercilious Northern nemesis. The Brooklyn-based cultural critic Nelson George chided Atlantans for expressing anxiety about *A Man in Full*: “Come on, now. Wolfe wrote about Atlanta like it was a major city in this world.”<sup>2</sup>

However, in the months before publication, many of Atlanta’s civic leaders and boosters remained implacably concerned that Wolfe’s novel would damage their image of an “international city.” The Buckhead Coalition, a business group led by Sam Massell—the ex-mayor who introduced the slogan “the world’s next great city” in 1971—withdrawn Wolfe’s invitation to speak at their annual meeting when advance reports suggested that the novel was an exercise in “Buckhead bashing.” There was particular concern regarding rumours that Wolfe paid close attention to real estate development. Commentators in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* speculated as to which of the local developers provided the model for Wolfe’s mooted central protagonist. John Portman commented that “I’m sure his [Wolfe’s] characters are composites,” while fellow “real estate baron Charles Ackerman, who met with Wolfe several times,” admitted that “[w]e’ve kidded about who’s in the book at parties.” However, other developers were more obviously perturbed: Portman’s great rival Tom Cousins “refused to comment, remember[ing] how Wolfe skewered New York bond traders in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*,” and clearly fearing that Atlanta real estate developers would suffer a similar fate.<sup>3</sup>

The novel also prompted sceptical discussion about Atlanta’s continuing status as a literary “non-place” (see Chapter 7). The city’s limited presence in

Southern and American letters jarred with its chiefly economic claims to “international” status. In his review of *A Man in Full*, Reed noted the contrast between the “World-Class, Major-League City” performatively announced on signs at Hartsfield International Airport, and the paucity of fictional representations of Atlanta. Reed observed that “all this coverage [of *A Man in Full* in the *Journal-Constitution*] could only remind readers how long it has been since the last bestseller about this pushy, acquisitive New South city--which raises the question of why Atlanta produces or even attracts so few good writers, which raises the question of what ‘world-class’ really means.” In the *Journal-Constitution* itself, there emerged an unusual air of introspection, even self-flagellation, when Don O’Briant invited novelists and prominent citizens to give their views as to why “Atlanta has been largely ignored by the literati.” Siddons reiterated her nostalgia for an earlier Atlanta. Terry Kay criticised the sense of impermanence that arose in “a city that is continually destroying itself.” Crime writer Robert Coram dismissed the possibility that Atlanta could ever be considered a literary locus: “Other cities have been the locale for serious novels, but those cities have more substance than Atlanta. Writing a serious book about Atlanta is like writing about the hole in a doughnut.”<sup>4</sup>

Though Kay and Coram’s words seem bracingly scathing when compared to the boosters’ rhetoric, they imply that the large-scale real estate redevelopment or (to use a term Kay hints at) the creative destruction of Atlanta is inherently antithetical to “serious” or even interesting fiction. Tom Wolfe evidently disagreed with this view. As O’Briant rather over-excitedly observed, Wolfe “practically salivated over the prime literary territory he discovered” in the city. With characteristic hubris, the author himself commented that “[t]here should be 25 or

50 novels about Atlanta by now. What are these novelists doing?" It transpired that Tom Cousins' concerns were not unfounded. Wolfe uses his man at the centre, real estate magnate Charlie Croker, to emphasise the role of land speculation and real estate development in metropolitan Atlanta. In this chapter, I consider how *A Man in Full* represents the capitalist production of place in the so-called "international city." I draw upon social and spatial theorists such as Fredric Jameson and Manuel Castells to elucidate Wolfe's interrogation of Atlanta's "international" image: an image that has (as we saw in Chapter 7) been largely defined by the boosters, according to the city's burgeoning role within a (finance) capitalist world-system. I will also explicate Wolfe's depiction of the local and material politics of place that result from the speculative development and division of Atlanta's social geography.<sup>5</sup>

I want to begin my analysis of Wolfe's novel by considering an important scene in which Charlie Croker observes Atlanta from his private plane. The flight path of the Gulfstream Five (G-5) charts how, as Charles Rutheiser has observed, "the cutting edge of [land] speculation has shifted" away from Downtown and Midtown into "the outer tier of metropolitan counties," where "edge cities" now rise. But more interestingly, this panoramic set piece also suggests how Charlie's *visual* sense of Atlanta is inextricable from his status as a capitalist developer.<sup>6</sup>

## I

### *Mapping MXDs from a G-5: Charlie Croker's visual sense of place*

When Charlie first looks down from the window of the G-5, he consciously focuses upon the towers of Downtown, Midtown and Buckhead because these

(phallic) structures emphasise his exclusive status as one of the powerful (male) producers of Atlanta's corporate cityscape:<sup>7</sup>

Charlie knew them [the skyscrapers] all by sight. He knew them not by the names of their architects--what were architects but neurotic and "artistic" hired help?--but by the names of their developers. There was John Portman's seventy-story glass cylinder, the Westin Peachtree Plaza, flashing in the sun. (Portman was smart; he was his own architect.) There was Tom Cousins's twin-towered 191 Peachtree [...] There was Charlie's own Phoenix Center; and, over there, his MossCo Tower; and over there, his TransEx Palladium [...] Many was the time that the view from up here in the G-5, looking down upon the towers and the trees, had filled him with an inexpressible joy. *I did that! That's my handiwork! I'm one of the giants who built this city!*<sup>8</sup>

Fredric Jameson has posited that, under the postmodern cultural logic of late capitalism, "aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally" and that, "[o]f all the [postmodern] arts, architecture is the closest constitutively to the economic, with which, in the form of commissions and land values, it has a virtually unmediated relationship." Such an argument seems substantiated by Charlie's dismissive view of the architect and his celebration of the capitalist developer. From Charlie's perspective, the architect is no longer an artist at all, but merely commissioned "help," while Atlanta's towers are evacuated of any aesthetic, auratic quality by the developer's fetishising gaze. Indeed, the architectural artwork has been superseded by monumental mixed-use developments (MXDs) attributed entirely to the developers themselves, "the Creators of Greater Atlanta" (69). Tellingly, Charlie admires the man who Jameson

has deemed the doyen of postmodern hyperspace, John Portman--“a businessman as well as an architect and a millionaire developer, an artist who is at one and the same time a capitalist in his own right”--precisely because Atlanta’s preeminent developer is also “his own architect.”<sup>9</sup>

However, when Charlie “look[s] away from the buildings and out over the ocean of trees,” he is forced to recognise that Atlanta is populated by people, and that these people do not reside in the corporate “islands” of Downtown and Midtown. Rather, “most of them” (63) live beneath the trees--obscured from Charlie’s omniscient gaze. And yet, if Charlie cannot *see* the suburbs of Greater Atlanta, he can *mentally* map them. This is because Charlie was involved in their very development; he rapturously recalls “[h]ow fabulous the building booms had been” in “those subdivided hills and downs and glades” (63-64). As the semantic fusion of “subdivision” and “hills” subtly suggests, Nature has been penetrated by--co-opted to--the rapid construction of Atlanta’s residential real estate.

Charlie is well aware that “most of them [the residents of Greater Atlanta] are white,” whereas “[f]ewer than 400,000 people lived within the Atlanta city limits, and almost three-quarters of them were black” (63). However, the developer clinically constructs his vision of Atlanta according to property values. It is thus hardly surprising that, while Charlie concentrates his omniscient gaze upon Downtown’s corporate towers, or mentally maps the suburban landscape of Greater Atlanta, he never focuses his (mind’s) eye upon the unprofitable, profoundly racialised inner-city. Charlie’s gaze only shifts away from the suburban treetops when the plane turns and he sees Perimeter Center, “the nucleus around which an entire edge city [...] had grown.” Charlie apparently encountered this “damn term” in “a book called *Edge City* by somebody named Joel Garreau.” Yet

there is a certain irony to the novel's invocation of Garreau. We are told that Charlie believes "[t]he book put into words something he and other developers had felt, instinctively, for quite a while"--the shift in development from downtown to the perimeter. However, by invoking the national myth of the pioneering individual, and by claiming that this figural hero invented "edge city," Garreau actually tends to elide the role of real estate developers and multinational capital. It is Charlie, not Garreau, who emphasises that Atlanta's edge city progenitors are wealthy real estate developers--Mack Taylor and Harvey Mathis (Perimeter Center), Don Childress and Frank Carter (Cumberland-Mall Galleria) (64).<sup>10</sup>

Charlie's attention is engaged by Perimeter Center because he has begun to build his own edge city in Cherokee County, north of Atlanta. The project got underway when Charlie tried to purchase 150 acres of rural real estate, only to discover that speculators had already bought up south Cherokee, transforming the "trees and pastures" into "investor land." As Charlie's ex-wife, Martha, explains, this is "land that's too valuable to be devoted to farming or timber but not yet ready for developing. So investors buy it for a song, like Charlie thought he was going to, and then they just sit on it, waiting for the time when they can sell it for a big price for development" (511). Because land values have been inflated by such speculation, Charlie found that 150 acres would "cost approximately \$4 million" (595). Wolfe here suggests the extent to which agricultural production in traditional, rural north Georgia has been replaced by finance capitalist land speculation in contemporary, metropolitan Atlanta. In his contribution to *I'll Take My Stand*, Andrew Lytle attacked what he saw as an "effort to urbanize the farm [...]--to convince the farmer that it is time, not space, which has value." Lytle optimistically hoped this "industrial" scheme would fail. However, in *A Man in*

*Full*, preemptive speculation in the (sub)urban expansion of Atlanta into previously rural areas has resulted in what Lytle called the “abstract” social relationship of capitalist “absentee-landlordism.” The economic abstraction of Cherokee’s former farm land is compounded by the fact that *finance* capitalist property speculation is divorced from any mode of production, agricultural or otherwise; in David Harvey’s definition, it is solely “oriented towards the expectation of future value [...] future profits from the use of the land.” In other words, and pace Lytle, rural space *has* been (de)valued by time--the future time of finance capitalist profits from “investor land.”<sup>11</sup>

Viewing this scene in relation to a familiar Southern literary landscape, and citing Walker Percy once again, one can say that large-scale land speculation and development has moved beyond the “gleaming high-rises of Atlanta” itself into “O’Connor country.”<sup>12</sup> In Chapter 7 we saw how in Flannery O’Connor’s short story “The Artificial Nigger” (1955) Mr Head defines a pastoral sense of place in his all-white home county in terms of its difference from black, urban Atlanta. But in 1990s Georgia, the geographical boundary between Atlanta and the outlying counties of O’Connor country has been blurred by real estate speculation. Indeed, Charlie finally acquires the required acreage for his Concourse project by co-opting the white Southern racism of Head’s spiritual descendants. In unlikely cahoots with Ku Klux Klan member Darwell Scruggs (and populist black politician Andre Fleet), Charlie simulates a KKK rally and a subsequent civil rights march “protesting racism and de facto segregation in this old rural county that’s practically all white” (511). This pseudo-event makes “the national news on television for a couple of nights” (510) and serves to devalue the investor land, enabling Charlie to buy it up at a knockdown price. If Wolfe’s plot device seems

improbable, we might usefully see it as an example of postsouthern parody--albeit with serious implications for the traditional Southern "sense of place." The familiar rural racism of O'Connor's Head is played out in desultory, stylised fashion by the latecomer Scruggs; even then, the Klan's stand for white racial (and spatial) purity has been exploited by a capitalist developer. Here is an irony that Scruggs does not appear to understand, and that Head would have hated: if racial integration does not destroy Georgia's all-white rural enclaves, Atlanta real estate development will. For not only Cherokee, but also Paulding and Forsyth counties, are *becoming* metropolitan Atlanta.<sup>13</sup>

Yet Charlie receives comeuppance for his shady dealings in rural real estate. Having since completed the construction of Croker Concourse, the developer's original speculations in Atlanta's spatial "futures" market have proven awry anyway. Charlie complains that "[a] few years down the line somebody would make a fortune off what he had put together [...] but for now--*too far north, too far from the old city, Atlanta itself*" (65). Suddenly, the sight of his failing edge city reminds Charlie that his major creditors, PlannersBanc, are threatening to repossess all of his Atlanta properties--including the Concourse itself. The developer's gaze is no longer so imperious: "Did he dare open his eyes and look down? He didn't want to, but he couldn't help himself. Just as he feared, the G-5 was in the perfect spot for an aerial view of Croker Concourse. There it was [...] a preposterously lonely island sticking up out of that ocean of trees. Croker's folly!" (64-65). Charlie's proprietorial perspective on metropolitan Atlanta has been rendered so precarious by the prospect of bankruptcy and repossession that he is glad when the G-5 finally heads south to an old place--the neo-antebellum sanctuary of his plantation, Turpmtime (to which *I* will turn later in this chapter).



Jameson has posited that “in the realm of the spatial, there does seem to exist something like an equivalent of finance capital, indeed a phenomenon intimately related to it, and that is land speculation.” I have tried to show how the speculative shenanigans over investor land on the northern edge of metropolitan Atlanta exhibit this equivalence. I now want to focus on Charlie’s dealings with PlannersBanc, for here we find a further, deeper relation between (global) finance capitalism and (local) land speculation.<sup>14</sup>

## II

### *The forty-ninth floor of PlannersBanc Tower and the space of flows*

PlannersBanc is the Atlanta-based institution that supplied the loans that funded Croker Concourse. In total, PlannersBanc loaned \$515 million (42) to Croker Global at a time when “big loans were spoken of as ‘sales’” (44).<sup>15</sup> In the “palmy days” when those loan “sales” were arranged, the bank provided a forty-ninth floor room with a view that, much like the G-5, indulged Charlie’s omniscient, proprietorial gaze: “beyond the glass window walls, always exquisitely curtained against glare, all of Atlanta [...] was laid out before him. (*It’s all yours, Charlie*)” (46). However, the debt-ridden developer is no longer invited to the lavish, vertiginous confines of the executive floor. Charlie’s descending status within PlannersBanc’s customer hierarchy is symbolically enacted when the bank’s Real Estate Asset Management Department conducts its emergency meeting with the developer in a “cunningly seedy and unpleasant” (36) room on only the thirty-ninth floor. At the start of this meeting, PlannersBanc’s senior loan officer, Raymond Peepgass, observes of Charlie that “[t]he fool seemed to think he was still one of those real estate developers who own the city of Atlanta” (35). The

emergency meeting is designed to disabuse Charlie of this possessive attitude towards the city. Most explicitly, the Real Estate Asset Management team demands that Charlie sells some of his properties in order to start paying back the loans. But the bank also announces its dissatisfaction--and asserts its own superiority within the visual economy of Atlanta's corporate power structure--by obscuring Charlie's previously privileged, proprietorial view of the city from PlannersBanc Tower: "he should have been able to look out through the plate-glass wall and seen much of Midtown Atlanta [...] But he couldn't...It was the glare. He and his contingent had been seated so that they had to look straight into it" (36).

When the recalcitrant Charlie continues to default on the loans, PlannersBanc ups the pressure by focusing its own proprietorial gaze upon Croker Concourse itself. Tricked into watching a fake promotional video for his edge city, Charlie is subjected to PlannersBanc's panoptical, (re)possessive view of his under-occupied MXD: "Now the camera lingered lovingly on the tower itself [...] Looking through the window on this side you could see through the window wall on the far side...floor after floor after floor...because there were no tenants in them" (594). By this point, Charlie is deeply depressed by the commercial failure of the Concourse project and the prospect of repossession and bankruptcy. When the lawyer Roger White visits the developer's office on the thirty-ninth floor of Croker Concourse and comments upon the "[s]pectacular view!" (553), Charlie responds in an uncharacteristically reflective manner: "If you look at Atlanta real estate long enough, you'll notice there was a time, not all that long ago, when folks didn't care about views one way or the other. Views came cheap as the air and a lot cheaper than dirt. Then [...] folks discovered views, and that gave everybody one more thing to get competitive about" (553-554).

Charlie's despondency reveals that PlannersBanc's merciless financial pressure has finally destroyed his own possessive gaze. But his mournful musings also help us to understand another dimension to the capitalist production of place in Atlanta. This process has gone beyond the financial valuation of land ("dirt," in Charlie's down home rubric) as real estate; beyond the Marxist problem of ground rent; and even beyond the material construction of MXDs. In what might be seen as a variation on Guy Debord's famous declaration that even the image has become a reified commodity in "the society of the spectacle," Charlie suggests that optical experience of the city has been infiltrated by the commodity logic of land speculation. The *visual sense* of place itself has narrowed into "spectacular views" of "Atlanta real estate." This is a telling critique coming from a man who, moving and working within the cityscape of corporate Atlanta, has internalised the speculative spatial economy of "spectacular views" as his own existential-visual sense of place. If, as Roger observes, Charlie waxes like "the Old Philosopher" (554), it is because he not only stands to lose the property and capital he has accrued through land speculation; he also stands to lose his very way of seeing and being in the world.<sup>16</sup>

Situated amid the prime corporate real estate of Atlanta, PlannersBanc Tower's symbolic capital serves as a material, spatial sign of PlannersBanc's immense resources of finance capital.<sup>17</sup> However, there is one moment in *A Man in Full* when PlannersBanc Tower seems peculiarly *immaterial*. This is when, during a meeting of the Real Estate Asset Management Department, Ray Peepgass finds himself looking "[t]hrough the glass inner wall of [an] office": "he could look through other glass walls, into other offices, in toward the very core of the forty-

ninth floor. And everywhere he looked, he could see the eerie luminous rectangles of computer screens, and across those screens blipped the two hundred to three hundred *billion* dollars that moved through PlannersBanc every day" (238). PlannersBanc's window walls effect an optical illusion: the erasure of the forty-ninth floor's local, material geography. The divisions between the various offices appear to have vanished. In this moment, Ray--despite working at the bank for years--loses any familiar physical *or* visual sense of place.

I want to suggest that Ray's dislocation arises because the glass walls of PlannersBanc Tower express, in barely mediated architectural form, what Jameson calls "the fundamental source of all abstraction," the money form: more particularly, the bank's dealings in massive amounts of international yet placeless finance capital.<sup>18</sup> Looking at the figures on the screens, Ray tries to comprehend the bank's daily billion dollar dealings in material, spatial terms--"*mov[ing] through* PlannersBanc every day." The problem is that, as Jameson has observed, finance capital "separates from the 'concrete context' of its productive geography," becoming a "second degree" abstraction of the money form, which "always was abstract in the first and basic sense." So, unlike capital abstracted to only the first degree, the financial capital that Ray "sees" is not represented by any *material* sign, such as gold or paper money. Nor does it "move through" any physical location ("concrete context") in PlannersBanc--except as *numerical* signs on the computer screens (that is, if a computer screen "can properly be regarded as a place").<sup>19</sup>

In this scene, then, PlannersBanc Tower seems to have melted into air. At the very least, the building appears to have attained a "second sense" of placelessness that approximates the "second degree" abstraction of finance capital itself: the (albeit illusory) dematerialization of the forty-ninth floor's office space is

compounded by the placelessness of figures on the screens. All told, Ray's momentarily defamiliarised view of the forty-ninth floor enables him to perceive that PlannersBanc is less a visible, physical locus (PlannersBanc *Tower* in Midtown Atlanta) than a node within the immaterial, transnational matrix of technologically mediated finance capital exchange. To employ Manuel Castells' distinction, the forty-ninth floor is less a "space of places" than a "space of flows" within the "global network of capital flows."<sup>20</sup>

This brings us to the issue of Atlanta's status as an "international city." PlannersBanc's evident role in what Castells calls the "internationalization of the process by which capital circulates [through] widespread utilization of new information technologies" seems to bear out the boosters' rhetorical claims that Atlanta is an "international city." Indeed, the bank has semiotically shed its provincial "Old South" image, changing its name from the Southern Planters Bank and Trust Company in order to perform a more suitably *postsouthern*, "international" identity. Adopting the compound fashion of "NationsBank, SunTrust, BellSouth" and others, "PlannersBanc" is intended "to show how cosmopolitan, how international, how global [the bank] had become" (37-38). However, such a definition of "international(ization)" is entirely economic, tied to the "international financial markets themselves, increasingly working in their own sphere according to a logic distinct from that of any national economy"—and distinct from *Atlanta's* local economy or social geography. In 1936, Allen Tate attacked a form of "finance capitalism [...] top heavy with a crazy jig-saw network of exchange value"; Tate was dismayed by the disorienting effect that this "remote" system had upon individual lives. Yet Tate could hardly have imagined

PlannersBanc Tower's abstract "space of flows"--the apotheosis of placelessness in an "international city" increasingly defined by global finance capital exchange.<sup>21</sup>

However, it is vital to qualify that, however "placeless" the finance capital in which PlannersBanc deals, such abstract economic power does impress itself upon Atlanta's material geography. I have already cited the monumental case of PlannersBanc's own Midtown tower, which Castells might explain as an example of "the increasing tension between places and flows." In *The Informational City*, Castells emphasises that, even though the *organisation* of finance capital exchange is placeless, *control* of finance capital exchange is place-specific. Even if, as Castells suggests, Atlanta still seems regional by comparison with New York, the city's growing role in the centralised control of multinational finance capital is revealed in "Manhattanised" towers like PlannersBanc. PlannersBanc Tower, then, is not simply symbolic capital *signifying* finance capital; it locates the *control* of finance capital. Certain areas of Atlanta--Downtown, Midtown and Buckhead--have thrived upon the dialectic between local, material place and multinational, abstract capital flows.<sup>22</sup>

One can make further connections between global finance capital and local land speculation, between the abstract "space of flows" and the material "space of places," in *A Man in Full*. For PlannersBanc's involvement in billion dollar exchanges of capital empowers the bank's own role in the production of Atlanta's corporate space *beyond* its Midtown tower. The most notable example of PlannersBanc's investment in Atlanta is, of course, Croker Concourse. Indeed, it is international capital speculation that makes PlannersBanc a *more* significant force in the Atlanta real estate market than Charlie Croker. Whereas the rebranding of the "Southern Planters Bank and Trust Company" legitimately referred to the

bank's dealings in global capital, "Croker Global" is an egotistical, entirely performative misnomer: as the Real Estate Asset Management Department meeting reveals, Charlie has no overseas operations (51). Despite Croker Global's synergetic expansion into wholesale food production, the corporation's capital resources are measly compared to those of the bank. PlannersBanc accrued multimillion-dollar debts through its disastrous dealings with Charlie and other developers--and yet, the bank's resources are such that it is able to write off those debts, even as it makes to seize Croker Global's various properties. Ultimately, it is this "international" economic power that enables PlannersBanc to exert its omniscient, possessive gaze upon Charlie and his edge city.<sup>23</sup>

### III

#### *From the forty-ninth floor to Underground Atlanta(s)*

Discussing the "postmodern cartographies" produced by leftist cultural critics in recent years, Brian Jarvis has observed that "[Fredric] Jameson and [David] Harvey often appear mesmerised by the awesome incorporative power of late capitalism." Jarvis further notes that "Jameson's views of landscape often seem to come from *within* the centres of luxury and affluence" (the most famous example being Jameson's view from within Portman's Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles). From what we have seen of *A Man in Full* so far, it might seem that similar criticisms could be levelled at Tom Wolfe's literary map of postsouthern, "international" Atlanta. The breathless litanies of Downtown and Midtown MXDs ("There was John Portman's seventy-story glass cylinder," and so on) might suggest that *Wolfe* is "mesmerised" by the large-scale capitalist development of Atlanta. We might wonder whether the "spectacular views" of the city "from *within*

the centres of luxury and affluence” (PlannersBanc Tower and Croker Concourse) merely reproduce, in omniscient narrative form, the possessive visual economy of a capitalist real estate developer—or, as John Shelton Reed worried, an Atlanta booster.<sup>24</sup>

However, *A Man in Full* does not only observe and represent Atlanta from within postmodern capitalist hyperspaces. As Reed noted, *A Man in Full* also reveals the “largely unknown parts of the city.” Citing Michel de Certeau, one might say that Wolfe shows how the spectacle of the “panorama-city” from Croker Concourse or PlannersBanc Tower is the land speculator’s own “optical artifact [...] a projection that is the way of keeping aloof.” As we have seen, Wolfe critiques the reifying visual ideology of capitalist land speculation via Charlie’s remarks on the “spectacular views” of Atlanta real estate. However, the novel also features “ordinary practitioners of the city [who] live ‘down below,’ below the thresholds at which visibility begins.” Mapping MXDs from the G-5, Charlie may not have seen any other Atlantas, but they are visible in *A Man in Full*.<sup>25</sup>

The socio-spatial chasm between those “above” and those “down below” is evident in a brief encounter between PlannersBanc’s chief executive, Arthur Lomprey, and an immigrant market-stall operator in Underground Atlanta, the Downtown commercial complex. Despite PlannersBanc’s speculative influence on the “international” image and material development of Atlanta, its senior employee is detached from the everyday lives of most citizens. We witness Lomprey only within a particularly exclusive version of what V.S. Naipaul has called “the bubble in which the white professional people of Atlanta lived: the house, the air-conditioned car, the office [...] the luncheon club.” In Lomprey’s case, the rarified loci are the Piedmont Driving Club, the High Museum, and his forty-ninth floor



office at PlannersBanc Tower. This office affords a panoramic view “north toward Buckhead, east toward Decatur, and south toward Downtown and, assuming you wanted to, the vague expanse of the lower half of the city” (606). There is here a subtle implication that Lomprey’s speculative gaze is much like Charlie’s: it glazes over the poor, black Southside, which is decidedly not prime development land.<sup>26</sup>

Lomprey is, then, in unfamiliar surroundings when he purchases “a fake Patek Philippe watch from a Senegalese street vendor out in front of Underground Atlanta with \$65 of his own money” (236). Lomprey buys the watch to acknowledge a particularly effective performance by the Real Estate Asset Management Department’s “workout artiste,” Harry Zale, who (literally) seized a \$30,000 Patek Philippe watch from one of the bank’s intransigent debtors. However, Lomprey’s jest achieves its effect not just by celebrating Harry’s chutzpah. It also plays upon the incongruous image of PlannersBanc’s chief executive undertaking a petty cash transaction with an immigrant market-stall operator. Put another way, the joke evokes the socio-economic chasm between PlannersBanc’s position in the global, finance capitalist space of flows, and the local, immigrant-operated space of places that is Underground Atlanta.

There are two extended set-pieces in *A Man in Full* that more thoroughly depict other, (under)ground-level Atlantas. The first of these is Roger White’s limousine tour from Buckhead to Vine City with Mayor Wes Jordan; the second is Conrad Hensley’s experience as a fugitive among the immigrant population of “Chambodia.”

*From Buckhead to Vine City*

Roger White's tour emerges out of a conference with Mayor Jordan during which the two men discuss the rumour that Georgia Tech's star running-back, Fareek Fanon, has raped Elizabeth Armholster, the daughter of the "chairman of Armaxco Chemical and about as influential a businessman as existed in Atlanta" (4). Wes identifies the larger social issues surrounding the impending scandal: "Okay, not to belabor the obvious, there are two Atlantas, one black and the other white [...] You see all the towers in Downtown and Midtown--that's all white money, even though the city is 70 percent black, perhaps 75 percent black by now." However, black Atlantans are fully aware of the city's socio-spatial inequality--an awareness that, Wes suggests, arises from their own visual sense of place: "Our brothers and sisters in this city are not blind [...] They see" (183).

The usually loquacious mayor admits to Roger that "[i]t's hard to put it [Atlanta's unequal geography] into words [...] It's going to be a whole lot easier if I *show* you" (183). Interestingly, *A Man in Full* here echoes the scene in Siddons' *Peachtree Road* where mayor-elect Ben Cameron tells Gibby Bondurant that "I'd rather show you." In both novels, the mayoral limousines then proceed on a chauffeur-driven tour from Buckhead to a poor, black South Atlanta neighbourhood. Because *A Man in Full*'s mayoral tour exhibits an intertextual, even "palimpsestous" relation to *Peachtree Road*'s earlier, equivalent journey (set in 1961), it is possible to map the historical continuities of racial segregation and geographical uneven development that survive within the "international city."<sup>27</sup>

Mayor Jordan first has the chauffeur, Dexter Johnson, drive by the expensive Buckhead properties of Croker and Armholster. These houses are hidden on private, tree-lined roads away from the general public's gaze, yet their

symbolic capital--or, in the novel's own Veblenese terms, "sheer homage to conspicuous consumption" (190)--attests to their owners' financial and social status. The mayor then directs the limousine through Atlanta's decentred business districts (no longer focused around Five Points, as in 1961, but along Peachtree Street, between Midtown and Downtown). Here, the narrative offers another awe-inspiring perspective on the material geography of multinational capital: a "canyon" of skyscrapers "streaming past on either side of Peachtree [Street], which was *the* place to have a tower" (195). However, Wes adds a commentary that *sees through* (rather than simply "*from within*") this mesmerising spectacle--a commentary that furthers the novel's critique of how the "national" and "international city" has been defined. The mayor observes incredulously that "[a]ll these towers were supposed to show you that Atlanta wasn't just a regional center, it was a national center." Wes points out International Boulevard, CNN Center, the Georgia World Congress Center and International Plaza--the latter a monument to "Atlanta's greatest international coup: the 1996 Olympics"--as evidence of the boosters' attempts "to make Atlanta a *world* center, the way Rome, Paris and London have been world centers in the past, and the way New York is today" (195). Yet Wes tempers this sceptical view of "international" Atlanta's performative signification. He recognises that the "business interests" *have* succeeded in transforming (this part of) Atlanta into a "*national center*"--according to their own *economic* criteria. The mayor also ventures that the boosters may yet make the globalisation rhetoric an (economic) reality: "They may just pull it off, turn this town into *the world center* [...] They know how to generate money" (197).<sup>28</sup>

However, the tour subsequently takes a turn that indicts directly both Atlanta's putative global status and its local politics of place. The limousine

suddenly leaves behind “all the glossy pomposity of the center of the world” (197) when it enters the black neighbourhood of Vine City. Roger’s gaze shifts abruptly from the “world center” that is “the business interests’ dream” (195) to witness a local poverty much like that which Gibby saw in 1961: “Three vacant lots in a row...overgrown with weeds and saplings [...] Through the weeds on one side of the house he could see a pool of collected water, out of which protruded...*junk*...of every sort” (198). Wes explains that, as the black middle-class moved to southwest Atlanta, “the folks that took our place weren’t owners, they were renters [...] and the landlord gives up on making any money on the property and walks away from it” (198). As such, the neighbourhood has gone into precipitous decline. Vine City’s nexus of place, race and rent reveals continuities with *Peachtree Road*’s Pumphouse Hill (though there is no direct landlord/tenant relationship between Buckhead and Vine City, as there was between the Bondurants and their tenants). Like Gibby before him, it has taken a mayoral tour to enable Roger to visually and mentally map the contrast between “the top” and “the bottom” (202) of Atlanta: “Roger looked round about the Bluff [...] in his mind’s eye he could see Armholster’s Venetian palazzo and Croker’s pile” (204).<sup>29</sup>

There are, though, qualifications that should be made regarding this powerful depiction of Atlanta’s historical-geographical uneven development. To do so it is useful to return to the start of the tour, and Mayor Jordan’s disquisition on how commercial cartographies of Atlanta reproduce racialised ways of seeing (or *not* seeing) the city: “Did you happen to see any of those ‘guides to Atlanta’ they published for the Olympics? [...] The maps--the *maps!*--were all bobtailed--cut off at the bottom--so no white tourist would even *think* about wandering down into South Atlanta.” Because such texts guided the white tourist’s gaze towards

what Rutheiser has termed the “ornamental nodes” of the Olympian “stage set [created] for visitors and viewers,” the black majority population of Atlanta were, as Wes notes, made “invisible” to “the rest of the world” (185). Indeed, the supposedly objective, omniscient views of the city offered in such tourist guides approximate nothing so much as the selective, speculative gaze of Charlie or Lomprey--perspectives that, as we have seen, ignore “the vague expanse of the lower half of the city.”<sup>30</sup>

*A Man in Full*'s mayoral tour can be seen as Wolfe's attempt to rectify or *replace* the Olympian maps' ideological bias. The journey from Buckhead through Peachtree Street to Vine City appears to be a more authentic, even mimetic (narrative) cartography of the so-called “international city.” However, it is important to recognise that the reader still experiences Atlanta from a particular, ideological point of view. Mayor Jordan's mapping, and lawyer White's reading, of the city emerge from a middle-class perspective. The two men grew up in Vine City but have joined the black middle-class flight to the West End (199); Roger is so estranged from his old neighbourhood that he does not even recognise much of it (an effort not helped, it must be said, by English Avenue's dilapidated state). There are echoes here of James Baldwin's observations on the black middle-class' post-1960s “limbo” from an increasingly ghettoised inner city Atlanta. It is true that the two men enter a black neighbourhood omitted from the Olympic maps, and that Wes wants to show Roger the contrast between the Buckhead background of Elizabeth Armholster and the ghetto youth of Fareek Fanon. Yet the mayor and the lawyer *do* seem to be “sightseeing” (183) in Vine City. Much like the Olympic promotional texts, Mayor Jordan acts as a “guide to Atlanta”--albeit

an *other* Atlanta--directing Roger's tourist gaze. Afterward, and like Mayor Cameron and Gibby Bondurant before them, Wes and Roger can go home again.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, if the reader experiences the tour through Roger's eyes (and "mind's eye"), there is also a certain overlap between Wolfe's status as omniscient narrator and Wes' position as Roger's (our) guide. Wolfe perhaps slyly acknowledges this equivalence by having the mayor state that "I'm just trying to construct a narrative, you might say, and I'm just hoping it'll unfold naturally" (193). The title that Wolfe gives to this chapter of the novel, "The Lay of the Land," is taken from another of Jordan's laconic comments upon the tour's purpose and direction (187). The sense that Wes' autopolitan tourist gaze/narrative overlaps with the omniscient author's is confirmed when one learns that, while researching the novel, Wolfe drove through English Avenue with former city planning director Leon Eplan.<sup>32</sup> The implication here is not that Wolfe is a white, bourgeois author and should therefore be disqualified from writing about black South Atlanta. Such a claim would be a simpleminded echo of Quentin Compson's undialectical claim to "Southern" authenticity, which here becomes: "You can't understand South Atlanta. You would have to be born there." Nonetheless, Toni Morrison had a point when she observed that: "You have *Gone with the Wind* [...] Then you have this Tom Wolfe book. And that's Atlanta. Boom. Over...And I thought, 'No, no, no.' No one is talking about Atlanta from the point of view of these people who know it--not the political way, not the way the marketers knew it, but on the streets, in the houses, in the schools." We should simply recognise that, for all the power of Wolfe's map of "the lay of the land" between Buckhead and Vine City, we do not experience Atlanta "from the point of view" of those "on the streets, in the houses" of the

black Southside. In Chapter 10, I will consider a novel (edited by Morrison) that does stake a claim to represent black south Atlanta's "street" level perspective: Toni Cade Bambara's *Those Bones Are Not My Child* (1999).<sup>33</sup>

*The Real International City: Chamblodia*

Conrad Hensley, the former Croker Global warehouse labourer cum fugitive, arrives in Atlanta via a space of flows rather different from that which facilitates the immaterial movements of multinational capital. Conrad's journey from Oakland via Portland to Atlanta involves a sophisticated transportation network that more usually assists the passage of (often illegal) immigrants into and across the United States. Upon arriving at Hartsfield International Airport, Conrad is met by his contact, Lum Loc, and taken to Chamblee, located in the northeast of metropolitan Atlanta. Chamblee, Doraville and Clarkston, where around 10,000 Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotian and Hmong refugees settled during the 1980s, comprise a district that offers an alternative vision of Atlanta as an "international city"--defined by its multicultural population, not the globalisation of finance capital flows.

Walking in Chamblee for the first time, Conrad is astonished to discover a commercial strip of small shops operated by southeast Asian immigrants that runs along New Peachtree Road (as Gibby Bondurant might observe, this is certainly *not* the original Peachtree Road). Conrad eventually comes to "ASIAN SQUARE" which, as a modest but apparently popular public space, contrasts with the simulated cosmopolitanism of Downtown's International Plaza (519). Indeed, as Rutheiser notes, on account of the burgeoning immigrant population "the stretch of Buford Highway near the cities of Doraville and Chamblee became known as

'Atlanta's *Real* International Boulevard.'" Chamblee's residents themselves celebrate their origins by unofficially renaming the town "Chambodia" (515).<sup>34</sup>

However, for all that Chambodia allows these immigrants to maintain a place-specific sense of identity and community, and for all the international origins of the heterogeneous populace, the district is distinctly segregated from the "international city." Conrad is struck by how the built landscape of immigrant-owned businesses around Buford Highway is "another world" (519). Wes Jordan ostensibly "belabor[ed] the obvious" by referring to "two Atlantas"; in fact, the mayor's bipolar map "rendered invisible" outlying areas like Chamblee and Doraville that have complicated the "polar shades of American-born black and white." Yet, by a grim irony, the new arrivals themselves, isolated on the northeast edge of the metropolis, are forced to map Atlanta in similarly binary terms. As Lum Loc notes: "This side, America. Other side, Chambodia" (518).<sup>35</sup>

Chambodians' status as second-class citizens is especially evident in their experience of police surveillance, which severely restricts their ability to achieve a mobile, social sense of place in Atlanta. As an escaped convict, Conrad is circumspect about walking around Chamblee, even though he has acquired a false driving license and birth certificate. Nonetheless, he is better off than the illegal Vietnamese immigrants he lives with, who cannot alter their appearance. Police surveillance is such that most new arrivals are told that they "[c]annot always walk around doing nothing in Chambodia" until Lum Loc "give[s] them IDs and they get work" (518). Consequently, many immigrants' everyday lives are literally confined to the private rooms of rented accommodation. We encounter an example of this from Conrad's point of view: "The tiny living room was now packed with people, with Vietnamese--must be fifteen or sixteen of them at least



[...] The place was ripe with the smell of too many human bodies in a small space” (515). The contrast between this restrictive, all too physical sense of place, and the abstract space of PlannersBanc Tower, could hardly be starker.

Eventually, Conrad himself comes under police scrutiny during an excursion into Chamblee. There are few pedestrians--not only because the immigrants are careful not to be caught on the sidewalks, but also because the built landscape around Buford Highway epitomises Atlanta’s status as an autopolis. Hence, Conrad is conspicuous despite his respectable appearance and white skin, and sure enough, he is soon pulled over by a police patrol car and asked where he is heading. Chambodia may be beyond or below the elevated worldview of a Croker or a Lomprey, but the locals *are* subjected to the gaze of state authority. In this instance, de Certeau’s “pedestrian speech acts”--the belief that “the long poem of walking manipulates spatial organisations, no matter how panoptic they may be”--seems like little more than a postmodern fantasy.<sup>36</sup>

Finally though, Chambodians’ unequal status within Atlanta is best exemplified by the labour market. Vietnamese immigrants invariably have to take “work on the assembly line” at the “[v]ery big chicken plant in Knowlton” (517). It is Brother, the eccentric poor white who rents Conrad a room in a decrepit antique shop in “Old Chamblee,” who explains the “place” that southeast Asian immigrants occupy in the local job market, and how such labour relations have redefined Chamblee’s demography: “It’s ’at chicken plant in Knowlton. Won’t no white man work there and no black man, either, these days. So they wants the Orientals, but they don’t want ’em living in Knowlton, so they park ’em in Chamblee and Doraville” (626). Knowlton and Chamblee, then, are not merely peripheral parts of metropolitan Atlanta; they are also buckled onto “the Broiler

Belt" of chicken-processing factories, the "latest industry of toil to reign in the South." Wolfe here provides *A Man in Full*'s most sobering example of how, out on the less glamorous edges of the postsouthern metropolis, beyond finance-sector employment in the space of flows, traditionally "Southern" manual labour is still being performed. The only historical change is that the workers are not Southern-born blacks, but the newest and most truly international residents of the so-called "international city."<sup>37</sup>

#### IV

##### *From Turpmtime to Oakland: Labour and Capital across Postsouthern America*

*A Man in Full* does focus upon one older, Southern place that appears to have little or no connection to the "international city": Charlie Croker's plantation, Turpmtime. In this final section, I want to consider Croker's performance of a traditional "Southern" identity and "sense of place" at Turpmtime; the plantation's actual (and elaborately obscured) economic basis in Atlanta real estate; and the labour links between this supposedly ur-Southern site and the national structure of corporate capitalism.

Charlie has convinced himself that he is the patriarch of Turpmtime through some "natural" selection of Southern manhood: "this was the South. You had to be man enough to *deserve* a quail plantation" (9). In fact, the developer became "Cap'm Charlie"--as he enjoys being called by Turpmtime's black employees--through the rather more prosaic process of purchasing twenty-nine thousand acres of south Georgia real estate. Aboard the G-5 during the flight from his failing edge city to the sanctuary of Turpmtime, Charlie rhapsodises over the aerial view of south Georgia's fecund landscape. However, there is a telling limit to Charlie's

dream of Arcady. This limit is first evident when he looks out over a “breathtaking” peach orchard, “gorgeous beyond belief,” only to conclude his meditations by “[w]onder[ing] who owns it?” (75). Shortly afterwards, Charlie follows the eyes of his financial adviser, Wizmer Stroock, to a house “amid a swath of orchards”; focusing his own gaze, the developer muses that it “[m]ust cost a fortune to keep up a place like that” (77). So it is that Charlie views south Georgia plantation country in much the way that he mapped Atlanta’s MXDs from the G-5--through the capitalist gaze of a real estate developer. The plantation is not some residual oasis of a “natural” or premodern South that has somehow survived outside the nexus of capital and land speculation. Despite Charlie’s rhetoric, Turpmtime is less “real life” (80) than real estate.

Charlie embellishes the plantation’s Arcadian image by contrasting it with the postsouthern metropolis: “When he was here at Turpmtime, he liked to shed Atlanta, even in his voice. He liked to feel earthy, Down Home, elemental; which is to say, he was no longer merely a real estate developer, he was . . . a man” (5). No matter that, according to Allen Tate, we “cannot pretend to be landed gentlemen two days of the week if we are middle-class capitalists the five others.” Charlie’s weekends as the “master of Turpmtime” (276), *not* his weekdays as a developer in Atlanta, make him feel like a man in full. However, this urban/Down Home dualism is disingenuous; the plantation’s economic base is firmly rooted in Atlanta real estate. In various interviews at the time of *A Man in Full*’s publication, Wolfe explained how the genesis of the novel, and its location in Atlanta (rather than New York), derived from the moment when “[s]ome friends invited me to see a couple of plantations down in Georgia in 1989.” Wolfe discovered that “[t]he plantations were owned largely by real-estate developers.” It seems certain--though

it is never explicitly stated in the novel--that Charlie, the son of poor whites from Baker County, bought Turpmtime on the back of his success as "one of the Creators of Greater Atlanta." What is more, the plantation is far from self-sufficient: the capital that maintains its antebellum image can also be traced back to land speculation in Atlanta. At the emergency meeting in PlannersBanc Tower, Charlie claims that Turpmtime is an "experimental farm" and "the main testin' ground for our food division" (52-53). In fact, the meretricious upkeep of Turpmtime is written off to Croker Global's food division (74)--which the developer bought in 1987 on the basis of his success in the "booming" Atlanta real estate market (72).<sup>38</sup>

It seems to be a particularly postsouthern irony: for Charlie to act like the "master of Turpmtime," the plantation requires capital accrued during Charlie's "real life" as an Atlanta real estate developer. But we might also note Charlie's affinity with another (fictional) entrepreneur whose role in the original Reconstruction of Atlanta provided capital enabling the creation of a similar, neo-antebellum sense of place. As we saw in Chapter 7, it is Scarlett O'Hara's success as a New South timber merchant that enables her to reinvent Tara in the image of the Old South. PlannersBanc's Peepgass is more perceptive than he knows when he refers to Charlie acting like "a son of the South Georgia sod" on "that ridiculous goddamned plantation of his, which he thinks is fucking Tara" (246). For like Scarlett with Tara, Atlanta real estate development has allowed "Cap'm Charlie" to imagineer Turpmtime--original, 1830s "Big House" and all--as a simulacrum of a "true antebellum Old South" (81) that never really existed.<sup>39</sup>

But whereas Tara remains merely a fetishised monument to some antebellum fantasy, Turpmtime has a subtle use-value that repays its debt to the

Atlanta real estate arm of Croker Global. Charlie utilises the plantation's simulated Old Southernness to woo potential corporate tenants ("pigeons") to Croker Concourse and his other Atlanta MXDs. He knows that "Turpmtime might not be, strictly speaking, an experimental farm, but it had paid for itself many times over in terms of bagged pigeons, a point he didn't know quite how to get across to those small-brained niche-focused motherfuckers at PlannersBanc." PlannersBanc's own pliable loan salesman, John Sycamore, was subjected to "the Turpmtime Spell" (278), thereby facilitating a generous flow of loans to Croker Global. Charlie thus exhibits a nuanced understanding of the plantation's synergetic value to his Atlanta real estate. He certainly shows more nous than Stroock, who suggests his boss should sell Turpmtime because it appears to be "a non-core asset not functionally integrated into the rest of the corporation" (68).

In *Gone with the Wind*, the loyal likes of Mammy and Pork gave Tara some semblance, however bathetic, of historical continuity between slavery and "free" labour. Croker's relationship with Turpmtime's black workforce appears to be that of a rather ludicrous latecomer playing out a part-time, postsouthern pastiche of what Richard King has called the "Southern family romance." However, "the Turpmtime Niggers" perform a crucial role in the seduction of Charlie's real estate clients: they provide an authentic sheen of slave-like labour to the plantation's simulated Old South. The "Turpmtime Spell" that Charlie casts over his prospective MXD tenants includes a calculated, profoundly racist simulation of what King calls the old "Southern conception of itself" as master and slave knowing "their place":<sup>40</sup>

[Croker] knew that the magic of Turpmtime depended on thrusting his guests back into a manly world where people still lived close to the earth, a

luxurious bygone world in which there were masters and servants and *everybody knew his place*. He didn't have to say who Uncle Bud was. He merely had to say his name in a certain way, and one and all would realize that he was some sort of faithful old retainer, probably black. (277, my italics)

If it is shocking that "Cap'm Charlie" requires his black employees to perform a minstrel-like image of antebellum slave labour (albeit for a cash wage), it is perhaps even stranger that these "real *country*" (55) people effectively work in the field of Atlanta real estate development.

Yet there remains one final turn to the case of labour relations at Turpmtime--a turn that leads not only to Atlanta, but also to California. Swayed by his romantic, proprietorial vision of Southern land--and, to some degree, his paternalistic sense of responsibility to the black employees--Charlie refuses to sell Turpmtime. Instead, he resolves to lay off 15% of the national workforce in Croker Global's food division. At this point, Charlie's peroration (during the emergency meeting at PlannersBanc) on "how Croker Global was today one of the biggest employers of unskilled black labor in that part of Georgia" (55) takes on dramatic irony. For among those Charlie lays off are the similarly "unskilled" (and not only black) labourers at a frozen foods warehouse in Oakland--including Conrad Hensley. In this instance, even the mystified use-value of Turpmtime as a site for "bagging" corporate tenants of Atlanta real estate hardly justifies shifting the job-cuts elsewhere, especially considering that the cuts occur in the one division of Croker Global that remains profitable (74). Ultimately, Charlie's desire to maintain his paternalistic, simulated, Old South sense of place at Turpmtime has an all too real impact on the lives of workers elsewhere in postsouthern America.<sup>41</sup>

## V

*Conclusion*

Tom Wolfe's focus on contemporary Atlanta reveals how land speculation and real estate development have produced a locus unlike any of those earlier places we have called "Southern." The rural landscape to the north of postsouthern Atlanta--O'Connor country--has been transformed into "investor land." Meanwhile, Charlie Croker uses his south Georgia plantation, an elaborate simulation of the antebellum South, to market Atlanta MXD office space to unsuspecting "pigeons." All told, *A Man in Full* seems to suggest that there is no residual or unmediated "South" that has escaped the effects of speculative capitalist development. However, such a reading would be to elide the end of the novel, evocatively and, I think, accurately described by Norman Mailer as "a mess, a *tidy* mess." Having been converted to Stoicism by his recently hired personal home care assistant--none other than Conrad Hensley--Charlie Croker decides to surrender all his "worldly goods" to his creditors (722). There then follows a brief Epilogue in which, as Mailer observes incredulously, "Charlie is not even present." Only in "a short paragraph" narrated by Mayor Jordan do we learn that Charlie has become a Stoic evangelist back home in Baker County and on "into the Florida Panhandle and southern Alabama" (732).<sup>42</sup>

Whatever the manifest problems with *A Man in Full*'s denouement, there are aspects that are particularly germane to my focus on the postsouthern sense of place(lessness). For I would argue that Wolfe resorts to a peculiar kind of "spatial fix" in the Epilogue. This term is usually understood to refer to "the absorption of excess capital and labor in geographical expansion [...] the production of new spaces within which capitalist production can proceed."<sup>43</sup> *A Man in Full*'s spatial

fix involves the textual production of places--Baker County, the Florida Panhandle and southern Alabama--that enable the text to escape the problem of capitalist spatial production in metropolitan Atlanta. Finally, Wolfe *does* appear to have been trapped *within* his own image of the "awesome incorporative power of late capitalism" to create, destroy and unevenly develop a place. Having so thoroughly delineated the depressing limits imposed on everyday life in "other" Atlantas (Vine City and Chambodia), Wolfe seems to have resorted to an escapist anti-climax in which Charlie simply surrenders his properties to Planne's Banc and other creditors before disappearing down home into rural south Georgia. After seven hundred pages suggesting that there is no Southern "sense of place" unaffected by land speculation or real estate development, the Epilogue vaguely invokes a residual, rural "South" that--unlike Atlanta, the investor land of north Georgia, or the plantations to the south--remains outside the spatial realm of capital.

Charlie's conversion to Stoicism is bound up in *A Man in Full's* troublesome ending. Wolfe does offer hints that we should be suspicious of the reborn Stoic's evangelical motives: Mayor Jordan mentions Charlie's ability to "talk [...] the bills out of your wallet" and his "syndication deal with Fox Broadcasting" (732). Ultimately however, Wolfe seems seriously to propose classical Stoicism as a moral counterpoint to the materialism of contemporary capitalist society. Like the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, Charlie comes to see being-in-the-world *per se* as a hindrance to "freedom." Such a yearning for transcendence evacuates the novel's earlier emphasis on *social* being mediated by and between processes local and global, abstract and material. It is telling that, upon resolving to proselytise the Stoic creed, Charlie (like Conrad) leaves Atlanta: the practical value of his new faith is therefore never tested *within* the capitalist metropolis. One might also note



that Croker the Stoic abnegates even that limited (if paternalistic) social responsibility he held as an Atlanta real estate developer cum plantation owner. It is one thing for Croker to renounce the commodity fetishism of “worldly goods”—“the Croker Global corporation, every last branch of it, my houses, my plantation”—for stoical character, “the only real possession you’ll ever have” (722-723). But his stoical turn must also require him to abandon Turpintime’s black labourers to PlannersBanc’s “worldly” economic motives. In leaving Atlanta, Croker also appears to have departed from social reality: if Roger White is the Epilogue’s “man of the world,” Croker has become a “vessel of the Divine” (727).

Of course, stoic philosophy is not new to the South, or to one text considered in this thesis. Charlie’s stoicism recalls the (albeit more aristocratic) worldview of Emily Cutrer in *The Moviegoer*. As is well-known, Walker Percy based Emily on his cousin and guardian William Alexander Percy, whose conservative vision of the neo-classical Old South’s decline led him (like Emily) to seek consolation in “the Stoic maxims of Marcus Aurelius.”<sup>44</sup> More specifically for my purposes, there are interesting parallels to the spatial turns played out in the epilogues to *The Moviegoer* and *A Man in Full*. At the end of Percy’s novel, Binx Bolling too becomes less a “man of the world,” a social being, and more a “vessel of the Divine”—though his leap of faith is more Catholic than Stoic. Yet at the worldly level, both protagonists end up by abandoning a postsouthern, capitalist landscape for a more familiar “Southern” place. As we saw in Chapter 3, Binx escapes from the ever-expanding, mass-produced suburbs of New Orleans and reenters Emily’s Old South sanctuary, the Garden District. Charlie renounces the corporate landscape of Atlanta and returns to rural Baker County. If Binx and Charlie both experience alienation at different periods in the capitalist

development of a sub/urbanised post-South, both find some sort of sanctuary in a traditional, Southern “sense of place.”

By depositing the reborn Stoic back in Baker County, well away from his earlier Atlanta-based economic tribulations, Wolfe finally (if fuzzily) privileges the rural South as one “worldly” locus that is freer than the postsouthern “international city.” This is not to imply that, in reality, there is nowhere like Baker County, no (rural) place that has resisted large-scale land speculation. My point is that *A Man in Full*’s all-too “tidy” Epilogue allows Wolfe to abandon postsouthern Atlanta and the complex issues of place, race and (finance) capital that he explored so effectively earlier in the novel.

## CHAPTER TEN

### Capitalist Abstraction and the Body Politics of Place in Toni Cade Bambara's *Those Bones Are Not My Child*

The autobiographical Prologue to Toni Cade Bambara's *Those Bones Are Not My Child* (1999) provides an intensely local narrative cartography of a working-class, African-American neighbourhood in southwest Atlanta. We witness the authorial figure "running down the streets of southwest Atlanta like a crazy woman"--running because "[a] cab can't jump the gully back of the fish joint and can't take the shortcut through the Laundromat lot." However, Bambara's Prologue does not detail these quotidian geographies just for the sake of it: her novel is immersed in the period (1979-1981) when Atlanta's black community was both torn asunder and brought together by the disappearance and death of a number of local children. The Prologue's protagonist walks through the wooded lot because, in such secluded spaces, she might find evidence that will help to solve the Atlanta Child Murders: "You stub your toe on brown glass [...] you pry loose a crusty beer bottle [...] beneath the bottle is a rain-blurred Popsicle wrapper. *Late summer*, you figure, moving on." The narrator runs frantically because she is supposed to meet her twelve year old child (apparently Bambara's own daughter, Karma) at school in a time and place when local youths were going missing, and being found murdered.<sup>1</sup>

The narrator observes that "[l]ess than five months ago, you would not have been running alone [...] your whole neighborhood would have mobilized the second you hit the sidewalk": Mother Enid and Brother Chad, even "[t]he on-

the-corner hard-heads.” But by 16 November 1981, five months after the arrest of a local black man, Wayne Williams, conciliatory signs have begun to appear in neighbourhood windows: “Let the Community Mend Again” (8-9). At one obvious level, *Those Bones Are Not My Child* exhaustively interrogates the official view that Williams was the singular Atlanta Child Murderer.<sup>1</sup> But through its perspective on and from the southwest neighbourhoods, Bambara’s novel also critiques the imagineering of Atlanta as an “international city,” a global capital of capital. Even before the novel proper begins, the Prologue foregrounds the social, spatial and representational lacunae between what Charles Rutheiser terms “[t]he ‘official’ mythology” or “advertiser’s monologue” of the “international city,” and another Atlanta that (albeit slowly) the child murders bring “to citywide, nationwide and finally worldwide attention” (17):<sup>3</sup>

Reporters everywhere were trying to make sense of what was happening in Atlanta. *Gone with the Wind* Atlanta. New International City Atlanta. Atlanta, Black Mecca of the South. Second Reconstruction City. Home of a bulk of Fortune 500 companies. Scheduled host of the World’s Fair in the year 2000. Proposed site of the World University. Slated to make the Top Ten of the world’s great financial centers. (18)

This Gibby Bondurant-like litany of Atlanta’s “world-class” economic and institutional potential is exposed not only by the international media’s focus upon the child murder case, but also by Bambara’s own oppositional narrative.<sup>4</sup> I begin this chapter by explicating how, through the representation of another Atlanta--by mapping black neighbourhoods and undeveloped wastelands on to the “international city”--*Those Bones Are Not My Child* reveals the tensions between the global (capital, and Atlanta’s position in the global financial “space of flows”) and

the local (murder, and the resulting anguish and activism of the southwest's black community). Even as it defines and shapes Atlanta, the hegemony of finance capital abstracts the other Atlanta(s)--grimly apotheosised in the missing-and-murdered children--out of existence.

## I

### *All That is Solid 'Fall[s] Through a Door in the Air': Capitalist Abstraction and Disappearing Bodies*

Marzala ("Zala") Spencer, the protagonist of *Those Bones Are Not My Child*, has "always prided herself on her knowledge of the city." As a young girl, Zala's father drove her around Atlanta, helping her to map familial and communal geographies:

he made certain that she understood that the Atlanta they had a stake in was not the mythical one drummed up in the guidebooks, the billboards, the newspapers ads, the novels, the glossy brochures with tables of figures and graphs and maps showing gray areas slated for "demographic changes and redevelopment." Atlanta, the real one, was documented in the sketchbooks, the scrapbooks, the photo albums, the deeds, family Bibles, in the memories and mouths of the elders, those who had stayed and those long since moved [...] (84)

There is here a distinct echo of Mayor Wes Jordan's critique of those authorised ways of seeing the city--guides to Atlanta, newspapers and maps--that elide and erase the historical geography of an "other Atlanta." The difference is that Zala possesses a local knowledge of southwest Atlanta that outstrips the voyeuristic,

“sightseeing” gaze of a middle-class black professional like Jordan or Roger White.<sup>5</sup>

However, Bambara complicates such simplistic claims to *the* authentic view and representation of “Atlanta, the real one.” In *A Man in Full*, Roger White knows corporate Downtown but loses all sense of place in Vine City. In *Those Bones*, Zala struggles to reconcile her highly detailed, relatively stable mental map of southwest Atlanta with the bewildering developmental flux of Downtown. Zala “realized that the downtown area she’s mastered at five, then remastered at ten [...] was a confusion of sawhorse barriers, open ditches, plank sidewalks, and sandy pathways for yellow Caterpillars carrying boulders in their maws” (85). According to Zala’s father’s binary logic, here we have one of those “gray areas slated for ‘demographic changes and redevelopment’” that constitutes the *unreal* Atlanta. Yet such large-scale creative destruction of Atlanta’s social geography can hardly be ignored. As we will see, Zala discovers that she must master and remaster not only the quotidian makeup of southwest Atlanta, but also the disorienting flux of land speculation and development throughout metropolitan Atlanta.

The notion of an authentic knowledge or counter-narrative of some “real,” non-commercial Atlanta is also undermined by the revelation that Zala’s working life is bound to the local boom industries of real estate and tourism. Zala’s “early training” has become a valuable commodity, enabling her “to contribute to the Black tour company’s information bank” (84). Similarly, Zala’s cartographic skills benefit the realty firm for which she works: after all, “[s]he knew what was there” (84). Indeed, of the Spencer family, not only Zala is in real estate: her estranged husband Nathaniel (“Spence”) co-owns the firm with his sister Delia. Whereas

Zala at least tries to move and mediate between corporate Atlanta and the southwest's African-American community, Spence has immersed himself in the former at the expense of the latter. Zala ponders how her husband has "been bitten by the Atlanta bug and started running around in business suits big-deal bragging, bar hopping, back slapping, power lunching with potential policyholders or real-estate investors" (75). To be sure, one can argue that, unlike Spence—who cannot even recall "if the Institute of the Black World was still there on Chestnut Street, or if Atlanta U's poli-sci department was still a progressive enclave" (116)—Zala retains a critical semi-autonomy from the "international city." However, it remains that Zala's own labouring role in Atlanta's economy of place ensures that the contrast between husband and wife is relative rather than absolute. Zala's historical-geographical knowledge is not rooted in some residual "real" Atlanta that somehow survives outside the capitalist "international city"; textually, it is not transfigured into a simple-minded aesthetic of anti-development.

Ultimately however, the Spencers' everyday lives in Atlanta are disrupted most brutally by the disappearance of their son, Sundiata ("Sonny"). At a basic physical level, even their most local (domestic) sense of place has been changed utterly. At home, Zala and Spence feel that "the walls [are] moving in" upon them: "Inches, feet, yards foreshortened. The conventional laws of perspective shot. Their son at the vanishing point" (122). Later, walking the streets in search of Sonny, Zala "pictured herself of late treading the ground with the suspicion that any minute it might crack open and suck her under" (151). Yet for all the terror of such moments—this sense of being crushed by the walls of one's home, or swallowed up by the earth—the self, the body, remains material. Elsewhere, the

novel describes black bodies disappearing altogether. Shortly after imagining her own son “at the vanishing point,” Zala muses upon those “[c]hildren [who] were sent on errands with no thought that a child could fall through a door in the air. Some said Jeffrey Mathis had vanished in a puff of smoke before he reached the Star service station” (126). What is going on here?

Most obviously, this metaphor of dematerialisation attempts to express something of the horror felt at the sudden, inexplicable absence of a loved one. The image captures the black community’s and Bambara’s own struggle to comprehend and narrate (“Some said”) such events. The seemingly literal disappearance “in[to] the air” of some mother’s son becomes a kind of horror- or ghost-story, told and retold. However, I also want to suggest that, here and elsewhere, *Those Bones Are Not My Child* relates this dematerialisation of black bodies to what (as we saw in Chapter 9) Fredric Jameson has called “the fundamental source of abstraction,” the money form. I would argue that this metaphor of a vanishing child intones and indicts “international” Atlanta itself. The metaphor critiques not only the way in which the city prioritised business and profit over the missing-and-murdered case, but also the abstracting power of capital itself in a city increasingly defined by land speculation and global financial exchange.<sup>6</sup>

In order to make my own argument less abstract, we might begin by considering the textual and social context within which Zala, the black community and the novel itself tells and retells this tale of one black boy’s mysterious disappearance:

That was the bewildering thing. Children had been bludgeoned, shot, stabbed, and strangled, and nothing had stopped. Conventions came to



town [...] Newspaper and magazine articles put asterisks alongside the Fortune 500 branches in Atlanta. Suits were pressed, briefcases were polished. And nothing stopped [...] Children were sent on errands with no thought that a child could fall through a door in the air. Some said that Jeffrey Mathis had vanished in a puff of smoke before he reached the Star service station. (126)

Here, the narrative directly connects and contrasts Atlanta's pursuit of profit with the city's failure, even refusal, to pursue the missing-and-murdered case. Between 1979 and 1981, significant elements of Atlanta's civic-corporate power structure continued to focus upon capital and profit--convention dollars (16, 152), real estate development and global corporate investment--in the midst of the murder of at least twenty-seven African-Americans. An old man who Zala meets in Central City Park wryly captures this mentality: "Only one kinda killing 'poze to talk about in the financial district" (168). Yet there is a grim irony at work here. For the apparent dematerialisation of black children like Jeffrey Mathis is not only obscured by, but also strangely *equivalent to*, capitalist abstraction. The irony becomes bilious when one considers that it is the lives, the bodies, of those who have no use-value in the "international city's" finance-capitalist economy that seem to become as invisible, immaterial, as the money form itself. All that is solid "fall[s] through a door in the air."

If capitalist abstraction obscures the disappearance of Jeffrey Mathis, it also infiltrates the Spencers' search for their own missing son. In the process, the couple's conception of, and relationship to, their putatively "real," authentic Atlanta is further complicated. On 11 October 1980, while trying to map the killer's (killers') route, Spence and Zala find themselves in a "new neighborhood."

Amid the new buildings and “partly bulldozed woods,” the Spencers observe “a vacant house from a former time of mills and farms and company stores” (204). However, rather than testifying to the historical sense of place that Zala’s father taught and practised, this remnant—one of a few remaining old buildings “slated for demolition” (205)—vividly emphasises the extent to which agriculture and rural industry have been replaced by suburban land speculation. Rather than referring to “the coexistence of modes of production” that Jameson identifies in earlier societies (and in Faulkner’s fiction), the abandoned building signifies the well-nigh total redevelopment around it. Indeed, because the old houses are “vacant,” it is Zala herself who must *invent* the “popular memory [...] in vivid narrative form” that has been erased from the place itself: “She imagined boarders pausing there to chat with the mailman [...] She pictured mill hands rising from sturdy chairs to spear potatoes from plain, chipped bowls” (204-205). But despite Zala’s own inventive efforts it is clear that, as such “hitherto surviving enclaves of socio-economic difference have been effaced,” other citizens have begun to suffer from a “waning of our sense of history” (or historical geography). This diminished historical-geographical consciousness is barely compensated by the prevailing profit ethic. Zala identifies the new development as “a community-to-be for self-invented people unsaddled by nightmares and conflicting dogmas, people who could toss mamasay and preachersay over their shoulders with a pinch of coke and, applying one of Atlanta’s upbeat sobriquets to their lifestyle (‘City too busy to hate’), required nothing further to move ahead” (204).<sup>7</sup>

In this sequence, *Those Bones Are Not My Child* echoes a point well made in *A Man in Full*: the older, urban-rural boundary between Atlanta and the outlying

counties of "O'Connor country" has been (creatively) destroyed by capitalist real estate development. The scene also shows just why Atlantans who want to maintain their "knowledge of the city" must master and remaster the wider, metropolitan geography of creative destruction. However, something more complex happens here and in a subsequent scene--Zala's trip to the Omni International mixed-use development--that brings into focus both the material reality of capitalist spatial (re)production and the abstracting effect of capital itself. Attempting to navigate their way home to southwest Atlanta, the Spencers suddenly realise that they have lost any sense of place: "Lost, they were safe for the moment. Zala squinted at the overcast sky for signs of a seam, for an entry into the other Atlanta where they'd been safe from moment to moment" (206). Evidently, Zala does not simply want to get back to the house on Thurmond Street. She wants to get back to "the other Atlanta," the one she knew before Sonny went missing. However, Zala has just stopped moving through Atlanta's actual built landscape. She has stopped trying to recover (or reinvent) spatial histories of labour and everyday life. Instead, she seeks a "seam" in the sky. Zala is shifting from the historical-geographical, the material, into the metaphysical, the abstract. To be sure, she may not conceive her thoughts in these terms: she just wants to get back to that time when her boy was still home. However, this "seam" in the sky seems less like a conduit back to some "other Atlanta" than the "door in the air" through which Sonny, Jeffrey Mathis and numerous other black children have "disappeared." In this moment, Zala's mystical yearning for escape from the present, from her own monomaniacal investment in the missing-and-murdered case, eerily echoes the dominant attitude in (and of) the "international city" itself--the impulse to ignore, even de-realise, the child murders.

Most worryingly, Zala's (very understandable) desire to disappear into a "seam" in the sky approximates the dematerialising (il)logic of finance capitalism, as it is mediated through the corporate geography and architecture of "international" Atlanta. This disturbing prospect is suggested when, on 19 December 1980, five months after Sonny's disappearance, Zala steps out of an elevator on to the twelfth floor of the Omni International: "Beyond was a wall of glass sun-splashed by the skylight. Behind the glass, blond desks floated on a creamy carpet with magenta zigzags. Zala got a good grip on her package and herself" (326). One recognises this phenomenon from *A Man in Full*: like Ray Peepgass on the forty-ninth floor of PlannersBanc Tower, Zala momentarily loses her physical sense of place. The glass window walls produce the illusory sensation that the desks are coming detached from material space.

Without recapitulating at length my argument in Chapter 9, I would emphasise that, like Ray, Zala is experiencing capitalist abstraction. Like a suitably "floating" sign of finance capital--itself a "second degree" abstraction of the money form--the desks seem to have "separate[d] from the 'concrete context' of [the Omni's] productive geography." Though the Omni is not an abstract "space of flows" on the scale of PlannersBanc (it is not a bank, the primary forum for the global flow of finance capital), its construction was funded by national and international investors. One can even say, with only a little poetic license, that the Omni International was built on air. As well as buying up the land upon which the Omni was constructed, developer Tom Cousins and his consortium purchased "air rights" to the space above. Zala is encountering these various forms of capitalist abstraction--the transnational investment/flow of global capital, the "second degree" abstraction of finance capital, speculation in air

(rights)--as they are mediated through the architectural form of the Omni itself. Zala's experience (circa 1980) helps to elucidate the *economic* power behind Joel Garreau's conception of the Omni (circa 1981) as "the home of every distracting environmental stunt that architecture has ever devised." Without identifying the role of capitalist abstraction in the postsouthern "international city," Garreau experienced the Omni as the hyperspatial antithesis of the Southern "sense of knowing where you are and who you are [...] quite literally knowing your place, both geographic and your position in it" (see also Chapter 7).<sup>8</sup>

Stepping out of the elevator, Zala initially seems alert to the dematerialising effect of the Omni's glass walls. She literally gathers herself together to avert the sense of placelessness, of floating into air. Yet whereas even a loyal PlannersBanc employee like Ray Peepgass saw *through* the glass walls to the space of flows of global finance capital exchange, the ostensibly more critical Zala is seduced: "'Glass,' she said, easing around the sofa. 'Glass, glass,' in case she hadn't given up on the dream of finding a permeable membrane to pass through to the other Atlanta where newspapers spoke of earthquakes in Italy, uprisings in Poland, the murder of a doctor in Scarsdale; the only hometown count the final score in the last Hawks game" (326). The glass towers seduce Zala because she still wishes to return to "the other Atlanta" that she knew before Sonny went missing. However, the dangers of such wishful thinking are more apparent than ever. Zala's fantasy of a "permeable membrane" or "seam" that takes her out of history, geography and the awful responsibility of searching for her son, into a "dream" of an earlier time and place, is channelled through the glass walls of the Omni, a veritable ground zero--or rather, vanishing point--of the money form. Indeed, from its economic base through its architectural form to its very name,

the Omni symbolises the “international city” itself: a phantasmagorical place where black children melt into air, where the only recognised “killing” occurs in the financial district, and where the only acknowledged hometown count is the final score from Omni Coliseum.

Crucially, however, Zala rejects the abstract fantasy that both the “seam” in the sky and the Omni’s glass walls seem to offer. She reminds herself that “there was no place to dream anymore [...] No place to dream and no way to live a rational life” (326). In other words, the “rational life” that her (really rather mystical) “other Atlanta” represents is irrecoverable for at least as long as (Sonny’s part in) the missing-and-murdered case remains unresolved. Zala will not be seduced by the capitalist “city of dreams,” whatever its guise. Instead, the Spencers—together with all the other community activists—will continue searching. In doing so, they begin to counter the way in which the hegemony of capital has obscured and abstracted the brutal, material reality of murder, and to offer another perspective on, another narrative of, the so-called “international city.” By narrating this search, and by reinscribing the materiality of black life and death through a body politics of place, Bambara too reconfigures the cartography of Atlanta.

## II

### *Recovering and Representing Atlanta’s “Throwaway Bodies”*

In a letter that she sends to relatives abroad, Zala identifies a link between economic and narrative/vocal power. She contrasts the power wielded by corporate Atlanta with that of local African-Americans: “Convention dollars speak so much louder than an invisible community silenced by their very wealth

of pigment and their very lack of dollars" (152). Yet it is by naming the local children that the black community begins to counter "the 'official' mythology," the "advertiser's monologue," and to make black children--whether safe, missing or murdered--visible, even material, again. The local storytellers were unable to recover Jeffrey Mathis from that "door in the sky," but the power of communal communication becomes apparent: "The boys were respectful. More, they looked grateful. For if someone called you by name, or only 'son,' 'junior,' 'boy,' even if they were scolding, then you were alive, alive to that community that named you" (313).<sup>9</sup>

When the Atlanta authorities do address the missing-and-murdered case, their own narrative method remains oblique, obfuscating the grim reality. Local television runs repeatedly a public announcement featuring a jingle entitled "Let's Keep Pulling Together, Atlanta" in which "Black and white citizens of all ages [are seen] holding fast to a rope in a tug-of-war against an invisible team." It takes the "invisible [black] community" to get beyond this abstract (non-) representation of an "invisible team" to identify the suppressed subtext: "what was being dragged up on the other end of that rope? The ten-second public announcement was supposed to be reassuring. It gave them the creeps" (461).

We are moving here from capitalist abstraction and the unspoken disappearance of black bodies to the material and textual recrudescence and recovery of the corporeal. In her recent revisionist study, *Dirt and Desire* (2000), Patricia Yaeger brings into focus the Southern literary and social significance of the (almost always African-American) "throwaway body." For Yaeger, the bleak archaeology of "digging children out of ditches" in "black literature about the South" also penetrates the complacent surface of the Southern literary-critical

“sense of place.” Yaeger shows how “the depths of southern ‘place’ yield the remains of foundation-bearing black folks who lie beneath the earth (the subjects of lynching, shooting, drowning, murder, beating, suicide, being ignored, or being worked to death).” Discussing Sarah Wright’s neglected novel *This Child’s Gonna Live* (1969), Yaeger notes that the narrative “struggles to gather up the child’s blasted remains [...] This novel presents the black child as someone who’s invaluable and yet becomes white culture’s throwaway.” A very similar struggle is central to *Those Bones Are Not My Child*: the black community, as well as the text itself, strives to recover the remains--“‘Remains,’ they [the Atlanta authorities] called the discoveries. A tag is affixed to the toe that extends from the sheet. A mother backs away. ‘Those bones are not my child’ (12)--and to represent and revalue black bodies and being.<sup>10</sup>

Yaeger also reworks another Southern literary-critical shibboleth, the grotesque. She insists “that the grotesque is a form of social protest steeped in local politics”--a form that, in Southern literary texts, helps us to remember and recover throwaway bodies that have been subjected to racist violence. Before considering Bambara’s grotesque body politics of place, I would suggest that, in the defining image of Jeffrey Mathis melting into air, Bambara also enacts a *postsouthern* form of the grotesque. Or, to shift to Fredric Jameson’s terminology, Bambara tells a “postmodern ghost story, ordered by finance-capital spectralities.” As we have seen, Mathis seems to have been obscured by, even made equivalent to, the abstraction of the money form itself. However, *Those Bones Are Not My Child* brings out the *grotesque* aspect of this equivalence by foregrounding the black community’s attempts to narrate the boy’s disappearance as a ghost or horror story, and by contextualising the disappearance in terms of



the “bewildering” indifference of the “international city.” Later in the novel, Bambara tells another postmodern ghost story that critiques finance capitalist abstraction. One night, four months after Sonny’s disappearance, a breeze-like presence passes through the Spencer home and enters a pair of boots on the porch, so that it seems like “an invisible boy were standing in them” (262). In this scene, Sonny’s “ghost” (like Jeffrey Mathis) continues to haunt the text and the “international city” itself. Despite having been obscured by, even made equivalent to, the spectral power of finance capital, the missing (and murdered) children have not been entirely abstracted out of existence.<sup>11</sup>

But *Those Bones* also utilises the grotesque body politics of place that *Dirt and Desire* describes. Most redemptively, Sonny himself rematerialises in Miami—alive, although his body has been fouled by his experience (530), and he has become as deceptive and distracted as Atlanta itself (582). More morbidly, but no less powerfully, dead black bodies irrupt on to the pages of the novel, and into the “international city”: “Bacteria activated by the heat, swelling, the odor—any corpse looked like a homicide when it burst” (265). As a way of getting beyond contemporary capitalist abstraction, this intensely physical grotesquerie also gestures toward the grim historical continuity of African-American death in the South. One thinks of Emmet Till, battered by his murderers and bloated by the Mississippi river, and of a terrifying anecdote from James Baldwin’s meditation on the Atlanta child murders, *Evidence of Things Not Seen* (1985). Baldwin recalls how “[s]ome years ago, after the disappearance of civil rights workers Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner in Mississippi, some friends of mine were dragging the river for their bodies. This one wasn’t Schwerner. This one wasn’t Goodman. This one wasn’t Chaney. Then, as Dave Dennis tells it, ‘It suddenly struck us—

what difference did it make it wasn't *them*? *What are these bodies doing in the river?*""

Both Bambara and Baldwin provide case studies in "reverse autochthony." This is Yaeger's term for "a site where both grownups and children are hurled into water or earth without proper rituals, without bearing witness to grief, without proper mourning." Such scenes and sites of the grotesque serve to reconfigure our complacent Southern literary-critical "sense of place," and to expose the subterranean reality of the *postsouthern* "City too Busy to Hate."<sup>12</sup>

Another aspect of the grotesque body politics of place in *Those Bones Are Not My Child* is the critique of a material and economic equivalence between black bodies and waste. Yaeger argues that many Southern texts featuring throwaway bodies "present 'place' not as the nostalgic location of 'sights and smells and seasons' [Eudora Welty's definition] but as a trash heap with profound economic resonance." For Yaeger, this economic resonance of waste in "place" refers to the African-Americans who literally made the South, but whose bodies and very lives were discarded once their labour power waned.<sup>13</sup> But in *postsouthern* Atlanta, black bodies are immediately disposable because they have *no* such labouring use-value to an economy structured around land speculation and the global exchange-value of finance capital. Bambara's novel identifies a relation between these waste bodies and waste land, the secluded woods and empty lots that are not part of Atlanta's speculative spatial economy. I have already referred to the moment in the Prologue when the autobiographical narrator sifts through dirt-laden beer bottles and Popsicle wrappers in a secluded "wooded lot" for evidence of child murder (9-10). This relation between throwaway bodies and useless land is signalled again when Zala perceives a trash-laden lot--the *spatial* waste of geographical uneven development--as a funeral pyre for the missing-and-

murdered children: “Zala stared into the weeded lot and forced the dead bodies back into the shape of trash heaps” (164).

One should qualify that we do witness black children hard at work in *Those Bones Are Not My Child*. However, such labour occurs only in the interstices of the “international city”: “In a vacant lot back of the MARTA station, children, stooped as if working a snatch-row, collected aluminum cans [...] There was no play to their actions, though [...] They worked as though the family budget depended on their seriousness.” Though technically within the limits of the “international city,” this abject locus falls outside the finance capitalist space of flows. Instead, if anything, the image of children “working a snatch-row” evokes the local, historical geography of slave labour.<sup>14</sup> In such a wasteland, there is little to distinguish working with waste, the detritus of commodity consumption, and becoming waste oneself, as disposable as a Popsicle wrapper or a Coca-Cola can: “She [Zala] was thinking of the Jones boy, who’d been visiting from Cleveland. He’d disappeared while gathering cans with his Atlanta cousins, the papers said” (147).

*Those Bones Are Not My Child* attempts to recover, revalue and even rematerialise those black bodies that have been abstracted out of public life or reduced to waste by and within the postsouthern “international city” (and, Yaeger might add, by and within “Southern literature”). However, it remains a problematic enterprise. Firstly, Bambara must confront the relation between history and fiction, what she herself terms “the dodgy business of writing a novel about real events” (672). This is especially difficult when those “real events” revolve around a sensitive subject like the Atlanta Child Murders. Secondly, Bambara is faced by the inherent difficulty—one that has been especially

emphasised in postmodernism--of narrative representation. She must deal with the apparently abstract relation of language to material (not least spatial) reality, what Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist* (2001) describes as the "imaginary point, [the] nonplace where language intersects with our perceptions of time and space." Thirdly and most importantly, if *Those Bones Are Not My Child* suggests that capital's hegemonic role in the "international city" circa 1979-1981 turned black life, black bodies, into an abstraction, the novel risks simply reifying this logic.<sup>15</sup>

Bambara most clearly tries to ameliorate these difficulties through her characterisation of the Spencer family. At the risk of being accused of "fictionalising" a horrific historical-geographical reality, Bambara's focus upon the Spencers ensures that, as Valerie Boyd observes, "[t]he novel isn't about the infamous cases in an abstract way: It's about a particular family and what happens to its members when a son doesn't come home one Sunday in 1980." In Bakhtinian terms, by mediating her historical-geographical representation of Atlanta through the Spencers' perspective, Bambara produces a novelistic chronotope that is a "carefully thought-out, concrete whole." Through the agonising days and months of Sonny's absence, time "thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible." So too, as the Spencers and their fellow community activists map Atlanta--and countering the moment when Zala seems to be floating into air at the Omni--"space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history."<sup>16</sup>

However, the text must also deal with the more specific, highly sensitive issue of the murdered children themselves. In *Dirt and Desire*, Yaeger expresses serious reservations about narrative representations of the body that are "loaded with political and emotional anagrams of the social." Drawing on the work of

Slavoj Žižek, Yaeger warns that the tendency to see the grotesque--in the Southern case, mutilated and murdered black bodies--as cultural allegory can detract from the materiality, the "brutal physicality," of the body itself. In Bambara's case--and, of course, my own--there is a serious danger of representing black bodies (dead or alive) as *only* the *symbolic* equivalent of waste in a culture of commodity consumption, or as *only* a grotesque *metaphor* for capitalist abstraction.<sup>17</sup>

Bambara once explained her narrative aesthetic as an attempt to get beyond the metaphorical to the material, the physical: "I'm trying to break words open and get at the bones, deal with symbols as though they were atoms." This textual praxis approximates Bakhtin's vision of Rabelais as a novelist who wanted "word linkages and grotesque images [...] to 'embody' the world, to materialize it, to tie everything in to spatial and temporal series, to measure everything on the scale of the human body." For Bakhtin, this process of embodiment helps us to see and make the world anew. However, as Yaeger warns, black Southern bodies have rarely been "the exuberant site of cultural renewal that a theorist of the grotesque such as Mikhail Bakhtin might imagine." Even if we believe that Bambara successfully "break[s] words open and get[s] at the bones," that her own "word-linkages and grotesque images" not only rematerialise bodies, but also space and time in a city defined by capitalist abstraction, we are still left with Yaeger's provocative question: "What happens if we refuse to think about the grotesque as the objective correlative for civic decay?" What happens if we are forced to abandon socio-cultural allegory and focus upon the mutilated and/or murdered bodies themselves?<sup>18</sup>

I believe that Bambara resolves this fraught dilemma. Her struggle to make language material enough to represent and dignify the bones of Atlanta's dead children while guarding against "making the abjected body allegorical" is most powerfully apparent in the rendition of the Bowen Homes disaster.<sup>19</sup> On 13 October 1980, a nursery exploded in the Bowen Homes neighbourhood of southwest Atlanta, killing four children and a teacher. The authorities identified a faulty boiler as the cause of the explosion, and insisted that the incident was unrelated to the missing-and-murdered case. Nevertheless, alternative theories abounded. Once again Bambara, like Baldwin, invokes that lingering spectre of Southern history, racial violence: "It could've been summer '64, Neshoba County: missing--three civil rights workers [...] Chaney, Schwerner, Goodman." The narrative also suggests that the explosion might be linked to a convention of international right-wing racists taking place in Atlanta that weekend. Yet in a sequence that is both extraordinarily evocative and sensitive, the narrative homes in on the dead, dying and wounded children themselves. Like the community witnesses left "to shape the story" in the wake of Mayor Maynard Jackson's public, political speech, *Those Bones Are Not My Child* tries to tell the Bowen Homes story "right, lest it dishonor those who'd lived through it and those who hadn't" (297). Striving to represent, but also respect, the material reality of mutilated bodies, Bambara refuses to transform them into "political and emotional anagrams of the social":

A locket and chain torn from the neck ripped the skin of a toddler running with a slashed femoral artery through hot debris. Bawling babies crawled over blistered pacifiers, dropping scorched dolls on dump trucks smashed flat by scrambling knees cut on the metal edges of robots leaking battery

juice. Soaked socks, torn drum skins, hands crawling at the mesh of playpens while tinny xylophones plunked eerily pinching fingers. Spines rammed by table legs busting the strings of ukuleles curling into black lumps. Teddy-bear stuffing like popcorn in the gritty air where glass spattered into the wounds of toddlers. Flashcards fluttered high against Venetian blinds clattering down on brightly painted furniture collapsed on a baby boy's life. (277)

### III

#### *Toward a Global Sense of Place*

In Part VI of *Those Bones Are Not My Child*, after Sonny has been found in Miami and reunited with his family, the narrative shifts to rural Alabama, where the Spencers recuperate in the company of Marzala's mother, Mama Lovey, and the other members of her bee-keeping co-operative. There is something of an intertextual echo here: as we saw in Chapter 9, *A Man in Full's* epilogue enacts an abrupt (albeit offstage) shift from Atlanta to rural Georgia. According to the logic of my earlier argument, we might well ask whether Bambara is indulging in a version of the "spatial fix" I ascribed to Wolfe. Does *Those Bones* textually produce the retreat in Epps, Alabama, as a residual space of resistance to, or at least escape from, the grotesque death and abstraction of the "international city"? We may even want to reach back beyond Wolfe to ask whether Bambara is reconstructing the kind of neo-Agrarian opposition between urban hell/rural Eden that Flannery O'Connor interrogated in 1955 (see Chapter 7). In his long review of *Those Bones*, John Lowe commented that "[t]he Edenic treatment of these scenes [...] provides a useful contrast to the urban scenes, which are

appropriately hellish.” Certainly, Epps seems to offer an idyllic sense of community. Mama Lovey’s galvanising presence reaffirms Toni Morrison’s argument—an argument made with reference to earlier books by Bambara—that “[w]hat is missing in [African-American] city fiction and present in village fiction is the ancestor. The advising, benevolent, protective, wise Black ancestor is imagined as surviving in the village but not in the city.” Moreover, the co-operative itself (a member of the Federation of Southern Co-operatives) seems closer to the Agrarian ideal of rural, subsistence farms than anything else in the texts discussed in this thesis.<sup>20</sup>

However, despite everything, the Spencer family returns to what Lowe calls the “city of torment.” As the text posits the Spencers’ dilemma: “How could they go back to Atlanta? And how could they not?—it was home” (551). What is more, having returned to Atlanta, Zala and Spence continue to search into the missing-and-murdered case. They do so even after Wayne Williams’ trial has begun, and even though Zala’s “co-workers in the bank tower went to considerable lengths to obscure certain aspects of reality from themselves. ‘Which trial?’ they would have asked” (608).<sup>21</sup> However, Bambara does not only refuse the spatial fix that is Epps’ “Edenic retreat” in order to continue mapping Atlanta. Alongside the *regional*, “Southern” historical continuities of racism and murder, the narrative also provides a *global* perspective on race, class and economic inequality.

One of the Spencers’ friends and fellow community activists, Speaker, has a prominent role in the novel’s polyphonic narration of race and class oppression across regional and national boundaries. Symbolically, Speaker offers his own counter-narrative to the official mythology of “Lovely Atlanta” (171) from the centre of the financial district. However, when Speaker invokes the imprisonment



to hard labour of seventy-year old black, female voter-registration workers in Pickens County, Alabama, one of his audience interrupts: "That's Alabama [...] And this is Atlanta" (170). Though Speaker enters into the spirit of dialogic, call-and-response with his audience, he upbraids the heckler's view. It is, in fact, a worldview very close to that which Baldwin called a "stubborn and stunning delusion"--the false consciousness of those who, believing the "international city's" own hype, could claim: "*I'm from Atlanta. I'm not from Georgia.*" Speaker calls for a sense of solidarity against oppression within and *beyond* the place he calls the "Noose South" (173):<sup>22</sup>

"Tell me we aren't a cosmopolitan people!" Speaker shouted. "Tell me we aren't one big family with kinfolks scattered all over the world. Mississippi, Grenada, Alabama, Soweto, Brooklyn, St. Ann's Parish, Brixton, Bahia, Salvador, Christiansted, Mobile, Chattanooga--" he was breathless. "Charleston, Frogmore, Mosquito Island, Kingston, Robbins Island, Parchman Farm Prison, the projects, ya mudder's kitchen, Catfish Row. Whatchu think?" (170)

Elsewhere, various characters ponder just such "cosmopolitan" connections. Zala muses upon the New Cross "massacre" in Brixton, England (365), an event with parallels to the Bowen Homes explosion. Spence conflates Atlanta's own postmodern ghosts, the missing children, with the disappeared in Chile, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay--"loved ones dragged from schools, from jobs, spirited away in the dead of night," their ghostly images chalked on the walls of government buildings by the Women of the Disappeared (179).

The novel's most sophisticated revelation of the relation between socio-economic inequality within the "international city" and throughout the world

takes place in another glass elevator, in another of Atlanta's Downtown developments, John Portman's Hyatt Regency hotel. We join Zala in a "glass car [that] floated down past vine-tangled balconies toward the city street below" (480). It seems clear enough that this sense of "floating" recalls Zala's experience of capitalist abstraction at the Omni International. But as the elevator descends to street-level, the narrative expands beyond local or even national limits. Wealthy tourists entering the elevator trade "roof stories" about various international travel destinations: Lima, Paris, Rio, Tokyo and San Juan. One tourist observes distastefully the presence, beyond downtown Lima, of "corrugated lean-tos," and expresses relief "that no unruly *cholos* threatened their family-reunion in Atlanta." Another tells how "in Rio the geography was reverse; bandits lived in the hills with the poor and frequently came down from the hills to raid the estates below" (480-481).

In Chapter 9, we saw how the very "lay of the land" between Buckhead and Vine City operated as an objective correlative of the socio-economic difference between the "top" and the "bottom" of Atlanta. By subtly suggesting a comparative, transnational element to the geographical uneven development in and of various "international cities," Bambara expands Wolfe's narrative cartography to more explicitly global--and more explicitly critical--dimensions. What is more, *Those Bones* also reconfigures a conundrum posed by Southern literary critic C. Hugh Holman in 1972. As we saw in Chapter 7, Holman asked: "Can one take the glass-enclosed elevator to the twenty-second floor of the Regency Hyatt [sic] in Atlanta and look out upon a world distinctively different from what he might see in New York, Chicago or Los Angeles?" Holman worried that Atlanta was becoming a homogenous "national city." However,

when Zala “look[s] out of the Hyatt Regency’s glass elevator” (480) she not only envisions the vertiginous inequality that remains *within* the “international city,” but also--by critically refocusing the tourists’ complacent gaze--the uneven development that divides other *global* capitals (of capital).<sup>23</sup> In this defining moment, Zala moves toward what geographer Doreen Massey calls a “global sense of place.” She becomes alert to how, in Massey’s definition, “the geography of social relations” have become “increasingly stretched out over space”--not only by the globalisation of “geographical uneven development” *between* nation-states, but also by the commonality of inequality *within* various “international cities.” Hence, the globalised production of socio-spatial inequality also produces (albeit inadvertently) possibilities for globalised solidarity and resistance: “a really global sense of place” of precisely the kind that locals like Speaker, Zala and Spence preach and practice.<sup>24</sup>

In this chapter, we have seen how Toni Cade Bambara mediates between the material (body) and the abstract (capital); moves between the neighbourhood (southwest Atlanta) and the postsouthern “international city”; and makes connections between the local and global politics of class, race and place. Bambara helps us rethink not only our Southern literary-critical “sense of place,” but also the official definition of Atlanta as an “international city”--a financial centre in the global space of flows. All told, *Those Bones Are Not My Child* is a fitting last testament to what bell hooks called Bambara’s “wild mixture of down home basic blackness and a rare, strange all-over-the-place complex global consciousness.”<sup>25</sup>

## CONCLUSION

### Against the Agrarian Grain (Harry Crews and Barbara Kingsolver)

At the end of Part 1, I quoted David Harvey's claim that "[t]he preservation or construction of a sense of place" by individuals and social groups, in social reality and fiction, is more important than ever "in a phase of capitalist development in which the power to command space, particularly with respect to financial and money flows, has become more marked than ever before." In Parts 2 and 3 of this thesis, I have tried to show the various ways in which eight writers--from that original Agrarian white male Robert Penn Warren to the African-American resident of Atlanta, Toni Cade Bambara--have represented the capitalist spatial redevelopment of "the South." I have argued that these authors' "postsouthern cartographies" reconfigure radically our neo-Agrarian, Southern literary critical conception of "place." Yet while there are links between these new literary landscapes, there are also differences in the ways in which the texts' protagonists--to paraphrase Scott Romine--practice postsouthern place.<sup>1</sup>

In *A Place to Come to*, Jed Tewksbury can sound uncannily like Donald Davidson or Warren himself when observing the transformation of Alabaman agricultural real property into "a mere real estate development." However, this neo-Agrarian attitude is offset by Jed's refusal to romanticise subsistence farming--not least because farming in Nashville, the classicus locus of (academic) Agrarianism, has become a site for the performance of conspicuous Southernness. In Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*, Binx Bolling embraces, and even invests in, the

emergence of postsouthern, capitalist suburbia. However, Binx eventually recurses to a residual (and largely rhetorical) sense of “the South’s” supposed difference from “the North” that Jed, Chicago resident and regular visitor to Ripley City, South Dakota, could never sanction. Like Jed, and in postsouthern, parodic contrast to Binx, Richard Ford’s Mississippi-born Frank Bascombe accommodates himself to the small-town and urban “North”—in his case, Detroit and Haddam, New Jersey. However, in *The Sportsman*, Frank’s postsouthern world-as-text tends to elide the harsh realities of geographical uneven development and socio-spatial inequality as he “speculates” financially and textually in a capitalistic way of seeing, writing and being in the world. Only later, in *Independence Day*, does Frank successfully construct a postsouthern sensibility that not only accounts for the capitalist fetishisation of place as real estate, but also enables the practice of everyday life within and despite this speculative spatial economy.

In his famous essay “The Search for Southern Identity” (1958), C. Vann Woodward contrasted a generally American “quality of abstraction,” a “superiority to place, to locality, to environment” with what he (following his good friend Warren) saw as the South’s “fear of abstraction.” Woodward went on to cite the South’s concrete focus on “place, locality, and community,” as evidenced in the work and “experience of Eudora Welty of Mississippi.”<sup>2</sup> Yet neither Welty nor Warren ever confronted the degree of abstraction we find in *A Man in Full* and *Those Bones Are Not My Child*. In Wolfe’s postsouthern Atlanta, we witness a profoundly abstract sense of placelessness that derives from (to update Allen Tate) a top-heavy focus on *international* finance capitalism—what Harvey calls the awesome power of “financial and money flows” to define space. However, *A*

*Man in Full* identifies other Atlantas--in particular, Chambodia, an "international city" defined by its multicultural demographics, not by the global capitalist "space of flows."

Yet Wolfe's sense of the power of capitalist uneven development, socio-spatial inequality and state surveillance leaves, quite literally, little space for an oppositional practice of everyday life. On the contrary, and despite an even more dispiriting depiction of racialised inequality and capitalist abstraction, *Those Bones Are Not My Child* charts the struggle of African-American residents of Atlanta to redeem everyday life even in the midst of murder and loss. Whereas Binx returned to the sanctuary of New Orleans' Garden District, Gibby Bondurant retired to his Buckhead summerhouse, and Charlie Croker went down home again, the Spencer family not only returns to Atlanta, but also begins to build a *global* sense of place. The novel itself constructs a postsouthern cartography that goes beyond the neo-Agrarian limits of "Southern literature," beyond the "international city," and even beyond the national boundaries of Ford's postsouthern America.

At this late stage, it should be clear that I have focused deliberately upon urban and suburban geographies because, as I argued in Chapter 2, our literary-critical apparatus--the very concept "sense of place"--has derived from an image of "the South" as rural and agricultural. I have taken a historical-geographical materialist approach to the socio-economic production and abstraction of "place" because, in my opinion, this defining issue has been sidelined--to the extent that Southern literary criticism has even elided the Agrarians' own emphasis upon the relationship between "capitalism and land." Nonetheless, it seems to me that one question resounds above any others raised by this thesis: what about the

contemporary rural South? The Agrarian ideal of agricultural, subsistence-based real property might be defunct--the Agrarians' "South" may be redundant--but what of the rural landscape that yet remains? Real estate may have displaced agricultural real property in (Warren's) Alabama or (Wolfe's) metropolitan Atlanta, but should we consider the forms of small farming that yet survive--albeit not on the yeoman-subsistence model apotheosised in Andrew Lytle's "The Hind Tit"? Finally, when a theorist like Fredric Jameson states that postmodernism has fully erased "precapitalist agricultures," the empirical evidence seems compelling enough. But might Southerners--and Southernists--still balk at Jameson's confident assertion that Nature itself has been effaced from postmodern America?<sup>3</sup>

In a provocative essay entitled "Recognizing Rusticity: Identity and the Power of Place" (1997), Gerald Creed and Barbara Ching challenge Jameson and two other spatial theorists I have marshalled in my support--Harvey and Edward Soja. Creed and Ching note that "[p]ostmodern social theory's stable reference point has been the city," at the almost total expense of the country. They observe that Jameson "feels no need to justify his equation of the postmodern with the urban," and assert that Soja simply offers a "variation on the Marxist distaste for rural idiocy." Ching and Creed argue that, not least because of urban(e) intellectual disdain for the "rustic margin," there has been a "radical embracing of that marginality by many people in order to contest the late twentieth century's hegemonic urbanity."<sup>4</sup>

Upon reading this from a (post)southern perspective, one is impelled to note that the *original* Agrarian movement was precisely a radical (radically reactionary) embracing of the rural South by *not* very many people in order to

contest the *early* twentieth century's increasingly hegemonic urbanity. Indeed, Southern intellectual and literary-critical thought has been, until very recently, so disproportionately dominated by neo-Agrarianism that one cannot seriously claim that postmodern or postsouthern theory has (yet) marginalised the rural South. One only has to consider a critical volume like *The Future of Southern Letters* (1996), or the back catalogue of Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, to see that rusticity, not urbanity, remains hegemonic in Southern thought and fiction. In my own defence, I would also emphasise that I have tried to demonstrate the links *between* the country and the city. I have explicated the economic nexus between Turpmentime and Atlanta real estate in *A Man in Full*, and discussed the social relations between southwest Atlanta and the co-operative farm in Alabama in *Those Bones Are Not My Child*. But despite these qualifications, I do accept the basic point that a postsouthern theoretical approach to contemporary fiction risks reproducing the city-centric logic of postmodern "place" theory. As such, I would like to conclude the thesis by considering very briefly a couple of contemporary writers who have reconfigured rural, agricultural "place" against the Agrarian grain.

In the last few years, significant critical attention has finally been given to Harry Crews, who has been publishing fiction since his first story appeared in *Sewanee Review* in 1963. Matthew Guinn has argued persuasively that Crews' work has been marginalised from a neo-Agrarian Southern literary because it focuses upon the poor white--a figure that, as we saw in Chapter 1, drew scorn from an Agrarian like Stark Young. More than that, though, Crews' *A Childhood: The Biography of a Place* (1978) also exposes the ideological lacunae in the ostensibly less elitist Agrarian vision of the yeoman subsistence farmer as the man at the centre



of their proprietary ideal. For Crews' autobiographical narrative brings into focus the far more widespread and grim reality of tenant farming. He describes how, in Bacon County, Georgia, circa 1927 (and things had not changed when Crews was born in 1935) there were in fact "very few landowners. Most people farmed on shares or standing rent."<sup>5</sup> Crews proceeds to critique the arrival in Bacon County of tobacco, a "money crop," and the way in which the "illusion" of tobacco profits captivated men who had previously been subsistence (tenant) farmers (43). This critique might seem to be in the Agrarian grain of John Crowe Ransom's "Land!" or Lytle's "The Hind Tit." However, Crews resolutely refuses to romanticise subsistence farming, or small farming generally. Indeed, as Guinn has perceptively observed, Crews interrogates the "rhetoric of tradition" that resonates in "The Hind Tit"--"[i]njunctions such as Lytle's to 'throw out the radio and take down the fiddle from the wall.'" As Crews writes, Bacon County's tenant farmers

loved *things* the way only the very poor can. They would have thrown away their kerosene lamps for light bulbs in a second. They would have abandoned their wood stoves for stoves that burned anything you did not have to chop. For a refrigerator they would have broken their safes and burned them in the fireplace, which fireplace they would have sealed forever if they could have stayed warm any other way. (132)

For Lytle, the fiddle is, like corn and sallet (see Chapter 2), a magical anti-commodity symbolising the Southern agrarian way of life. By contrast, Crews shows that, for Bacon County's tenant farmers--by now displaced to urban, industrial Jacksonville precisely because farming did not pay--modern, capitalist "*things*" have an aesthetic- and use-value that cannot be dismissed as mere

commodity fetishism. This implicit (and elsewhere, explicit) critique of Lytle's Agrarian aesthetic of anti-development is all the more intriguing if one knows that "Mr Lytle" was Crews' literary mentor.<sup>6</sup>

Crews shows how the concepts of "homeplace" (30) and private property were revered by Bacon County's small farmers despite, or because of, the pervasive experience of extreme poverty and tenant status. However, as the culmination of Crews' refusal to romanticise rural, agricultural Georgia, the autobiography ends with a poignant vignette that expresses Crews' own sense of *displacement* from Bacon County and tobacco farming circa 1956. More generally, *A Childhood* describes deliberately and self-consciously a place and people that no longer survives. Whereas Welty's *Losing Battles* was conceived by certain critics as the "last great 'Southern' novel" because it represented a (textual) return to a sense of place based upon subsistence farming (see Chapter 2), Crews has no such nostalgic illusions about his memoir. His "biography of a place" depicts, as he warns at the start, "a way of life gone forever out of the world" (22)--and to the extent that this way of life was no Agrarian idyll, he refuses to mourn.

The vicissitudes of *contemporary* farming feature heavily in Barbara Kingsolver's fine, multifaceted *Prodigal Summer* (2000), set in and around the failing agricultural community of Egg Fork, Kentucky. For starters, and from the viewpoint of wildlife biologist and National Forest guard Deanna Wolfe, the novel problematises the pastoral ideal of farmers at one with Nature. Deanna decries the hunting and maltreatment of wild animals and trees by Appalachian farmers. From another perspective, that of cantankerous old Garnett Walker and his feud with a neighbour, Nannie Rawley, *Prodigal Summer* narrates a debate over

chemical/industrial farming versus organic farming. Rather than simply constructing a binary opposition and coming out in favour of organic farming, Kingsolver develops a nuanced dialogue between the two neighbours. In the process, this dialogical imagination also takes us beyond Agrarian assumptions. When Garnett muses that “sometimes horsepower can do what horseflesh cannot”—he is pondering the agricultural use-value of a John Deere tractor as opposed to a mule—it recalls and reconfigures Tate’s famous distinction between “the complete horse” and “horsepower in general.”<sup>7</sup> Tate conceived “horsepower” as a conveniently agrarian metaphor for the abstraction of the industrialised, secularised modern mind; but for Garnett, and the other local farmers, such technology is necessary to sustain an agrarian way of life at all. Nor does Nannie’s organic mode of operation fit into the Agrarian ideal of subsistence farming outside the cash nexus. She sells her apples “to some company in Atlanta Georgia with a silly name,” and, to Garnett’s horror, employs Mexican pickers in lieu of the family or community members who did such work in the past (398).

But the contemporary realities of small farming are explicated most effectively in the story of Lusa Maluf Landowski. When her husband, Cole Widener, is killed in a traffic accident, Lusa—a self-proclaimed “Polish-Arab-American” (153) and former university researcher in natural science—is suddenly marooned on the Widener family farm near Egg Fork. Cole’s death while driving a delivery truck to North Carolina can be traced directly to the agricultural market economy—more specifically, to “the drop in [tobacco] price supports that had pressed him to take part-time work driving grain deliveries for Southern States” (50), an agribusiness corporation. Left with the debt-ridden “Widener place,” and refusing to “grow *drugs* instead of food while half the world’s starving” (124), Lusa

wants to grow corn (108). Lytle would likely have approved the sentiment, but Lusa comes up against the harsh realities of modern “farm economics” (124). Subsistence farming has become so unfeasible that the locals now “buy feed at Southern States and go to Kroger’s for a loaf of god-awful bread that was baked in another state” (294). Indeed, hardened farming members of the Widener clan have, with few regrets, left the land altogether to work in the nearby Toyota automobile plant (120-121).

Yet Lusa eventually transcends this farming community’s scepticism toward her urban, intellectual and immigrant background by manipulating, even re-mapping, the agricultural market economy. She hatches a scheme to collect and raise goats (worthless in the local economy) and sell them to an Arab cousin in New York before Id-al-Fitr and Id-al-Adha, two Muslim holidays organised around goat feasts. In becoming a landowner and farmer, albeit an unorthodox one, Lusa negotiates her position within the Widener family, as well as the narrative geography of “the Widener place”: “one long story, the history of a family that had stayed on its land. And that story was hers now as well” (440). But she also reconnects with her own family’s “farming lineages” (45)—not in the American South, but in Poland (104) and Palestine (164). Ultimately then, if *Prodigal Summer* rescues a rural, agricultural “sense of place,” it is not simply post-Agrarian or postsouthern: it is postnational.

There is much more that could be said about Kingsolver’s rich and complex novel, not least from an eco-critical angle. (I doubt whether many readers will come away from *Prodigal Summer* feeling that, for all its depressing revelations of despoliation and extinction, Nature has been entirely effaced.) One might also fruitfully consider how writers like Dorothy Allison, Larry Brown and Randall

Kenan have all in recent years, and in different ways, remapped the rural South through the prisms of race, class, gender and sexuality. However, such critical work is for another time and (sense of) place.

## NOTES

### Preface

1. Ellen Douglas, "Neighborhoods," in Marion Barnwell, ed., *A Place Called Mississippi: Collected Narratives* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), 456; Charles Reagan Wilson, "Place, Sense Of," in William Ferris and Wilson, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 1137-1138.
2. Michael Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998); Paul K. Conkin, *The Southern Agrarians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 106.
3. This was the title of an unpublished manuscript written by Ransom in 1931. See Conkin, 101.
4. Richard Godden, *Fictions of Capital: the American Novel from James to Mailer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 143.
5. Joseph Urgo, "Faulkner's Real Estate: Land and Literary Speculation in *The Hamlet*," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 48, no. 3 (Summer 1995), 443-457.
6. Davidson quoted in Virginia Rock, "Twelve Southerners: Biographical Essays," in *Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 373-374.
7. Manuel Castells, *The Informational City* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 348; Doreen Massey, "A Global Sense of Place," in *Reading Human Geography: The Poetics and Politics of Inquiry*, edited by Trevor Barnes and Dick Gregory (London: Arnold, 1997), 315-323.
8. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848; reprint, London: Verso, 1998), 41.

### Chapter 1

1. Frank Owsley, "The Irrepressible Conflict," in *Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand* (1930; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 69; Michael Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 6.

2. John Crowe Ransom, "Reconstructed but Unregenerate," *I'll Take My Stand*, 14; Robert Penn Warren, "The Briar Patch," *I'll Take My Stand*, 260-261; Charles Reagan Wilson, "Place, Sense of," in Wilson and William Ferris, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 1137.
3. Richard Gray, *The Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 50; Stark Young, "Not in Memoriam, But in Defense," *I'll Take My Stand*, 337, 336; Owsley, "The Irrepressible Conflict," 71. Gray explicates these divisions. See *Literature of Memory*, 50-54, and *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region* (1986; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 134-138.
4. Paul K. Conkin, *The Southern Agrarians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 90.
5. Richard Gray, *Literature of Memory*, 46, and *Writing the South*, 154; "Introduction: Statement of Principles," *I'll Take My Stand*, xlii. Though Donald Davidson and Andrew Lytle were also assigned to write the introduction, the final version was almost entirely Ransom's.
6. "Introduction: Statement of Principles," *I'll Take My Stand*, xliii. Ransom and Davidson had "used the term 'industrialism' as a sweeping label for all the evils that threatened the South" since 1927. In the aftermath of the Scopes Trial, they began to view "the Old South as a convenient example of a premodern, prescientific society" (Conkin, 36, 42).
7. Richard H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 52. As Mark Jancovich notes, the Agrarians also "drew upon critiques of capitalist relations produced by the pre-capitalist social classes of the South." This historical, ideological source helps to account for the Agrarians' idealised representations of the region (past and present) as a rural, agricultural, even pre-capitalist locus. See Jancovich, *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 12, and Gray, *Writing the South*, 147-158, on the relation between the Agrarians and earlier pro-slavery, anti-capitalist advocates.
8. Owsley, "The Irrepressible Conflict," 88; Ransom, "Reconstructed but Unregenerate," 20.
9. Andrew Lytle, "The Hind Tit," *I'll Take My Stand*, 243, 208, 226, 205; Richard Godden, *Fictions of Capital: The American Novel from James to Mailer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 143-144.

10. Godden, 140; Owsley, "The Irrepressible Conflict," 70; H.C. Nixor, "Whither Southern Economy?" *I'll Take My Stand*, 188-189, 199.
11. Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (1986; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 17, vi-vii, 34, 36. On the extent to which slave property value outstripped real property value in antebellum Southern states, see Wright, 19.
12. Conkin, 89-90; Scott Romine, "Where is Southern Literature?: The Practice of Place in a Postsouthern Age," *Critical Survey* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 12-13.
13. Donald Davidson, "I'll Take My Stand: A History," *The American Review* 5, (1935), 317-318.
14. Conkin, 100-101; Ransom, "Land! An Answer to the Unemployment Problem," *Harper's Magazine* 165 (July 1932), 219, 221. Ransom does not call for complete subsistence farming. In 1933, Ransom's equivocation was evident when he stated that "Agrarianism means old-fashioned farming; or the combination of a subsistence farming of the first place with a money farming of the second." See Ransom, "Happy Farmers," *American Review* 1 (October 1933), 527-528.
15. Conkin, 106; Owsley, "The Pillars of Agrarianism," *American Review* 4 (March 1935), 534, 537, 539.
16. Owsley, "Pillars of Agrarianism," 539.
17. The South itself was deemphasised in *Who Owns America?* as the Agrarians attempted to establish the "alliances with sympathetic communities everywhere" mooted in *I'll Take My Stand's* "Statement of Principles" (xxxix). Already in 1934, Ransom had adumbrated a more general "aesthetic of regionalism" that referred to New Mexico Indians rather than white Southerners. However, this aesthetic vision conceived the Indians in familiar terms, as subsistence farmers living largely outside the cash nexus. "So this was regionalism; flourishing on the meanest capital [...] they have sufficient means, and they are without that special insecurity which white men continually talk about, and which has to do with such mysterious things as the price of wheat." Ransom, "The Aesthetic of Regionalism," *American Review* 2 (January 1934), 291.
18. George Marion O'Donnell, "Looking Down the Cotton Row," in Herbert Agar and Allen Tate, eds., *Who Owns America?: A New Declaration of Independence* (1936; reprint, Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 162, 164, 169. Reminding us that the Agrarians were not against capitalism per se, but monopoly- or finance-capitalism, O'Donnell acknowledges that even the yeoman,



subsistence farmer is a capitalist "since he owns his own land, and since he may have a tenant or so." However, O'Donnell qualified that the farmer is yet not a capitalist "since his main concern is not to exploit his capital and his labor for a money income but to use them in making a living in goods" (168). Subsistence farming is thus valued to the degree that the cash nexus or "money economy" is minimised.

There is an irony lurking within Agrarianism's equation of liberty with property: the echo of nineteenth-century *Northern* republicanism--though, as Gavin Wright notes, the idea that liberty came with property had been largely abandoned in the North by this point (Wright, 113). Whatever else, republican rhetoric of liberty through property enabled the Agrarians to deemphasise their "Southernness" (see note 17) and portray themselves as the true heirs of Jeffersonian "Americanism."

19. Lytle, "The Small Farm Secures the State," *Who Owns America?*, 238; Warren, "Literature as a Symptom," *Who Owns America?*, 273; Tate, "Notes on Liberty and Property," *Who Owns America?*, 82-85. Tate cites two recent studies of capitalism and corporate property.

20. Ransom, "Land!," 221-222.

21. Davidson quoted in Virginia Rock, "Twelve Southerners: Biographical Essays," *I'll Take My Stand*, 373-374.

22. Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds* (1942; reprint, Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), 329.

23. Owsley, "Pillars of Agrarianism," 533-534.

24. See Pete Daniel, "Federal Farming Policy and the End of an Agrarian Way of Life," in Paul D. Escott and David Goldfield, eds., *Major Problems in the History of the American South: Volume II: The New South* (Lexington, Mass: D.C. Heath, 1990), 403.

25. See Conkin, 102.

26. Wright, 232.

27. Daniel, 400-401.

28. Wright, 241, 245; Numan V. Bartley, "The New Deal as a Turning Point," in Escott and Goldfield, 394.

29. Davidson, "Why the Modern South Has a Great Literature," in *Still Rebel; Still Yankees* (1957; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 175.

30. Godden, 142.
31. Davidson, "I'll Take My Stand: A History," 318, and "Agrarianism and Politics," *Review of Politics* 1 (April 1939), 116.
32. Gray, *Writing the South*, 163; Davidson, "Agrarianism and Politics," 125.
33. Conkin, 128.
34. Tate, "The Profession of Letters in the South," in *Essays of Four Decades* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1969), 527, 533. See also Ransom, "Modern with the Southern Accent," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 11 (April 1935), 184-200.
35. Tate, "Profession of Letters," 533-534.
36. Tate, "The New Provincialism," in *Essays of Four Decades*, 538, 541, 539, 545, 546.
37. Tate, "The New Provincialism," 535, 545, 546, 544.
38. Tate, "A Southern Mode of the Imagination," *Essays of Four Decades*, 581-582.
39. Davidson agreed that "the modern South has a great literature" precisely *because* modern capitalism caused the South's "traditional society" to come into "self-consciousness." See Davidson, "Why the Modern South," 172.
40. Joseph Urgo, "Faulkner's Real Estate: Land and Literary Speculation in *The Hamlet*," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 48, no. 3 (Summer 1995), 443. Urgo also wonders whether "Faulkner may have found inspiration in the history of land speculation in Mississippi" (455n). Certainly, in *Requiem for a Nun*'s virtuoso metahistory of Yoknapatawpha, Faulkner points out that "land speculators" appeared alongside "traders in slaves" at the genesis of the European's colonial, genocidal New World. Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (1951; reprint, New York: Vintage, 1975), 188.
41. Godden, 154-155.
42. William Faulkner, *The Hamlet* (1940; reprint, New York: Vintage, 1964), 118-119.
43. Robert Penn Warren, "William Faulkner," in Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery, eds., *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism* (1960; reprint, New York and Burlingame: Harbinger, 1963), 116, 120. Warren's essay-review of Malcolm Cowley's *The Portable Faulkner* first appeared in *New Republic*, 12 and 26 August 1946.
44. Frederick Karl, *William Faulkner: American Writer* (1989; New York: Ballantine, 1990), 288. Before Flem Snopes' arrival and ascendancy, Varner exemplifies the postbellum landlord capitalist described by Gavin Wright. As such, I would seriously question Urgo's claim that "Varner is,

above all else, a resident of Frenchman's Bend with no speculative skills," sentimentally tied to the Old Frenchman's Place as a domicile (Urgo, 457). One might even argue that not only Snopes and Varner, but also Frenchman's Bend's small farmers, have sullied the South's virgin land. If so, Eula Varner really signifies nothing (or at best, a mystical *pre*-proprietary ideal). Ultimately however, *The Hamlet* maps land ownership and speculation in relative terms similar to the Agrarians': petty bourgeois land ownership is positively virtuous when compared to Snopes' large-scale, speculative violation of "the fine land rich and fecund." (Compare notes 14 and 18, above.)

45. William Faulkner, *The Mansion* (1959; reprint, New York: Vintage, 1965), 328, 334, 333.

46. Richard Reed, "Real Estate in *Look Homeward, Angel*," *Southern Literary Journal* 19, no. 1 (Fall 1986), 48, 50; Thomas Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again*, excerpted in Escott and Goldfield, 471.

47. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* quoted in Francis Wheen, *Karl Marx* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), 119; Romine, 9.

## Chapter 2

1. Fred Hobson, "Surveyors and Boundaries: Southern Literature and Southern Literary Scholarship After Mid-Century," *Southern Review* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1992), 743-744.

2. Andrew Lytle, "How Many Miles to Babylon," in Louis D. Rubin and Robert D. Jacobs, eds., *Southern Renaissance: The Literature of the Modern South* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1953), 31-34.

3. Hobson, "Surveyors and Boundaries," 744.

4. H. Blair Rouse, "Time and Place in Southern Fiction," in *Southern Renaissance*, 126, 135.

5. Michael Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 41; Louis D. Rubin, "Thomas Wolfe in Time and Place," in *Southern Renaissance*, 300.

6. Richard Weaver, "Aspects of the Southern Philosophy," in *Southern Renaissance*, 27.

7. Louis D. Rubin and Robert D. Jacobs, "Introduction," in Rubin and Jacobs, eds., *South: Modern Southern Literature in Its Cultural Setting* (Garden City: New York, Dolphin Books, 1961), 16, 15-16, 24-25.

8. Frederick J. Hoffman, "The Sense of Place," in *South*, 67.

9. James Dickey, "Notes on the Decline of Outrage," *South*, 81, 85, 87, 85.

10. Louis D. Rubin, "Introduction to Torchbook Edition (1962)," in *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), xxvi, xxv.
11. Rubin, "Introduction to Torchbook Edition," xxxii, xxxiv, xxxi; Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature*, 37.
12. Louis D. Rubin, "Introduction: Library of Southern Civilization Edition (1977)," *I'll Take My Stand*, xvi-xviii. Considering that, in the wake of the Agrarian program's political failure, Davidson himself tried to shift the focus back from "practice" to "principles" (see Chapter 1), it seems a bit rich to condemn Rubin for focusing on metaphor or image over a "literal and practical program."
13. Louis D. Rubin, "Introduction: Library of Southern Civilization Edition (1977)," xix, xv, xviii; Michael O'Brien, "A Heterodox Note on the Southern Renaissance," in *Rethinking the South: Essays in Intellectual History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 168. Other essays that Rubin published between 1975 and 1982 follow this line. In "Fugitives as Agrarians: The Impulse Behind *I'll Take My Stand*" (1975), Rubin again emphasises the Agrarians' "South" as "symbol" and "metaphor," and for "imaging human experience." But once more there are hints of the contortions necessary to deemphasise the Agrarians' small-farm focus. Rubin claims that "[t]hose who read the volume as an attempt to will back into existence the historical Old South by a deliberate turning back toward mass subsistence-farming miss the point"--but parenthetically admits that "it must be said that several essays of the essays in the book encourage such a misreading." See Rubin, *William Ellis Shoots a Bear: Essays on the Southern Literary Imagination* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 157-159. See also "The American South: The Continuity of Self-Definition," in Rubin, ed., *The American South: Portrait of a Culture* (Washington: Voice of America Forum Series, 1979), especially 12-13 ("really a pastoral metaphor rather than a program for economic action").
14. Paul K. Conkin, *The Southern Agrarians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 90; Eudora Welty, "Louis Rubin and the Making of Maps," *Sewanee Review* 97, no. 2 (Spring 1989), 258.
15. Walter Sullivan, *Death by Melancholy: Essays on Modern Southern Fiction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 10, 11, 116; *A Requiem for the Renaissance: The State of Fiction in the Modern South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), xiv.
16. Sullivan, *Death by Melancholy*, 5, 7.

17. Sullivan, *Death by Melancholy*, 11; John C. McKinney and Linda Bourque, "The Changing South: National Incorporation of a Region," *American Sociological Review* 36, no. 3, (June 1971), 401, 404, 410; John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 168. Egerton seems to conform to and confirm Agrarian warnings about finance-capitalist land speculation. In a chapter on land, Egerton asserts that "if there ever was a distinction to be made between land use and misuse in the South and in the rest of the country, that distinction no longer obtains" (50). Egerton quotes from a recent report telling how ten thousand companies, ranging from small-scale subdividers of family farms to mass-scale corporations, are turning rural land sale across America into a \$5 billion annual business. Egerton invokes the same terms as Sullivan and other neo-Agrarians to describe what the South has lost--"the sense of place, of community, of belonging" (xx). *The Americanization of Dixie* should remind us that, in the 1970s, not only overt neo-Agrarian literary-critics like Sullivan were worried that "the South is just about over as a separate and distinct place" (xxi). Indeed, Egerton's focus upon anti-corporate agriculture (in Chapter 2) and land as personal property (Chapter 3) suggests that this political liberal has a specific (Jeffersonian) affinity with the Agrarians' proprietary ideal.

18. Sullivan, *Death by Melancholy*, x; Michael Cass, "Foreword," *A Requiem for the Renaissance*, ix.

19. Young quoted in the discussion entitled "Twentieth Century Southern Literature," in Louis D. Rubin and C. Hugh Holman, eds., *Southern Literary Study: Problems and Possibilities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 148.

20. Thomas Daniel Young, *The Past in the Present: A Thematic Study of Modern Southern Fiction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 7, 9, 8.

21. Hoffman, "The Sense of Place," 61; James Justus, "Foreword," in Jeffrey Folks and James Perkins, eds., *Southern Writers at Century's End* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), xi; Eudora Welty, "Place in Fiction," in *The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews* (New York: Random House, 1979), 116; Robert Daniel, "Eudora Welty's Sense of Place," in *Southern Renaissance*, 286.

22. C. Vann Woodward, "The Search for Southern Identity," in *The Burden of Southern History: Enlarged Edition* (1969; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 23-24; Jan Nordby Gretlund, *Eudora Welty's Aesthetics of Place* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994), vii.

23. Welty, "Some Notes on River Country," in *The Eye of the Story*, 299, 297, 295. The famous line "I have felt many times there [in the Mississippi river country] a sense of place as powerful as if it were visible and walking and could touch me" (286) is the most striking example of the pathetic fallacy.
24. Sullivan, *A Requiem for the Renaissance*, 52. See also "Twentieth Century Southern Literature," in *Southern Literary Study*, 141; and on Madison Jones as a "neo-Agrarian," see *Death by Melancholy*, 97.
25. Brown quoted in "Twentieth Century Southern Literature," in *Southern Literary Study*, 156. In his *New Republic* review, Jonathan Yardley referred to *Losing Battles* as the "'the last 'Southern novel'--or should I say the last good one.'" See Richard Gray, *Writing the South* (1986; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 217.
26. Eudora Welty, *Losing Battles* (1970; reprint, London: Virago, 1986), 39, 341, 342, 194.
27. Young, 24; on the "remarkably gloomy" worldview of Sullivan, see O'Brien, 159.
28. Allen Tate, "A Southern Mode of the Imagination," in *Essays of Four Decades* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1968), 582.
29. Lewis P. Simpson, "The Closure of History in a Postsouthern America," in *The Brazen Face of History: Studies in the Literary Consciousness of America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 268-269.
30. Kreyling, "The Fathers: A Postsouthern Narrative Reading," in Jefferson Humphries, ed., *Southern Literature and Literary Theory* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 186, and *Inventing Southern Literature*, 153-155; Stephen Flinn Young, "Post-southernism: The Southern Sensibility in Postmodern Sculpture," *Southern Quarterly*, 27, no. 1 (Fall 1989), 4.
31. Scott Romine, "Where is Southern Literature?: The Practice of Place in a Postsouthern Age," *Critical Survey* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 22; Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (1986; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 16.
32. Julius Rowan Raper, "Inventing Modern Southern Fiction: A Postmodern View," *Southern Literary Journal* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1990), 9-10, 6, 17-18; Romine, 15.
33. Romine, 11, 9, 23, 25.
34. Romine, 38; see also Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 74.

35. Drew Milne, "Introduction Part II: Reading Marxist Literary Theory," in Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne, eds., *Marxist Literary Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 22; Lina Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1988), 119.
36. Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 3, 12.
37. Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature*, 155; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 366.
38. Jameson, 405, 127.
39. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 297-298, 183, 185.
40. David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 243, 335.
41. Romine, 13. Conkin comments on "the verbal similarities" between Tate and Ransom's essays and *The Communist Manifesto* when the two Agrarians "occasionally substituted capitalism for industrialism" (76-77). Conkin also observes Tate's exposure to "the critique of capitalist society mouthed by leftist friends" (44) in New York during the late 1920s. See also Gerald Graff's essay "American Criticism Left and Right," which cites Tate circa 1939 on "the iniquity of finance-capitalism," and challenges the reader to distinguish Davidson from Marx or Georg Lukács! Graff, in Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen, eds., *Ideology and Classic American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 97, 118-119.
42. Jameson, 337; Faulkner, unpublished 1933 manuscript quoted in Fred Hobson, *Tell About the South: The Southern Rage to Explain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 3.
43. Jameson, 51; Soja, 7; Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*, 247, 306.
44. Stephen Smith, "The Rhetoric of Southern Humor," in Jefferson Humphries and John Lowe, eds., *The Future of Southern Letters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 173.

### Chapter 3

1. Lewis P. Simpson, "The Closure of History in a Postsouthern America," in *The Brazen Face of History: Studies in the Literary Consciousness of America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 268-269; Walker Percy, "Novel Writing in an Apocalyptic Time," in Patrick Samway, ed., *Signposts in a Strange Land* (London: Bellew, 1991), 166-167.

2. Robert Penn Warren, *A Place to Come to* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1977), 7. All further references will be incorporated into the main text.
3. Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1988), 119.
4. Michael Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 155.
5. See James C. Cobb's *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1990*, 2nd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 5-34, for an account of how small Southern towns battled to attract industry with the bait of low taxes and no unions.
6. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 11.
7. The original Agrarians were often mocked about the relationship between agriculture and academia. For example, see the 1933 satirical cartoon of "three little Agrarians [Tate, Ransom and Davidson] in their chosen element" reprinted in Paul K. Conkin, *The Southern Agrarians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 60.
8. Warren quoted in "The South: Distance and Change: A Conversation with Robert Penn Warren, William Styron, and Louis D. Rubin, Jr.," in Rubin, ed., *The American South: Portrait of a Culture* (Washington: Voice of America Forum Series, 1979), 327; Davidson quoted in Virginia Rock, "Twelve Southerners: Biographical Essays," in *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 374.
9. Tjebbe Westendorp, "A Place to Come to," in Richard Gray, ed., *Robert Penn Warren: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1980), 127, 130.
10. See for example Simpson, *Brazen Face of History*, 249, and Gary M. Ciuba, *Walker Percy: Books of Revelations* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 61-64.
11. Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer* (1961; reprint, London: Minerva, 1995), 7. All further page references will be incorporated into the main text.
12. Eudora Welty, "Some Notes on River Country," in *The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews* (New York: Random House, 1979), 286. See Chapter 2, including note 23, for a more substantial discussion of the Weltyan sense of place in this essay, and the way in which it veers toward the pathetic fallacy. See Philip Simmons, *Deep Surfaces: Mass Culture and History in Postmodern American Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 33, for a perceptive analysis of the patrimony sale.



13. See Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 118-137, and especially 131 on "vulgar" existentialism. See also note 15 below.

In "Carnival in Gentilly," an excerpt from *The Moviegoer* published in 1960, Percy pegged the price of Gentilly's "fifty to sixty thousand dollar homes" at "forty to fifty thousand." Similarly, he put the patrimony value at only "[t]wenty-five dollars a foot" (instead of fifty dollars a foot in the novel). That Percy made these changes and few others before "Carnival of Gentilly" was (re)integrated into *The Moviegoer* suggests the precise nature of his concern with place as real estate. Indeed, one might say that this precipitous rise in the price of property in the year between "Carnival" and the novel itself suitably mimics the speculative appreciation of property "values." See Percy, "Carnival in Gentilly," *Forum* 3 (1960), 11, 14.

14. Fredric Jameson, "The Brick and the Balloon: Architecture, Idealism and Land Speculation," *New Left Review* 228 (March/April 1998), 46.

15. See Edward G. Lawry, "Literature as Philosophy: *The Moviegoer*," *The Monist* 63, no. 4 (October 1980), 547-557, for a useful analysis of the existential nature of Binx's "everydayness." Lawry suggests that both Emily's "aristocratic Southern stoicism" (550) and Binx's "flight [...] into everydayness" (553) are what Heidegger calls "inauthentic" modes of "being-in-the-world." By contrast, the "search" is an existential quest for the authentic. I depart from Lawry by arguing that Binx's *existential* everydayness is specifically and inextricably related to his "sense of place"--his material experience of the urban-suburban form of "place" produced by capitalism. See Soja, 131-137, for an excellent discussion of "the Existential Spatiality of Being." Soja rejects merely solipsistic or "vulgar" existentialism (131) and extrapolates from Heidegger in order to emphasise that "being-in-the-world" is subject to social, spatial and economic influences.

16. Donald Davidson, "A Mirror for Artists," in *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 58.

17. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936; reprint, New York: Vintage International, 1990), 7.

18. Thomas Daniel Young, *The Past in the Present: A Thematic Study of Modern Southern Fiction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 8, 24.

19. Max Webb, "Binx Bolling's New Orleans: Moviegoing, Southern Writing, and Father Abraham," in Pamela Reid Broughton, ed., *The Art of Walker Percy: Stratagems for Being* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 20; Ciuba, 78.

20. Simmons, 39-40.

21. Lewis P. Simpson, *The Fable of the Southern Writer* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 197.

## Chapter 4

1. Richard Ford, "Walker Percy: Not Just Whistling Dixie," *National Review* 29 (13 May 1977), 561-562; R.J. Ellis and Graham Thompson, "Interview with Richard Ford," *Over Here: A European Journal of American Culture*, 16, no. 2, (Winter 1996), 114; Larry McMurtry, review of *A Piece of My Heart* in *The New York Times Book Review*, 24 October 1976, 16. Considering McMurtry's charge of "neo-Faulknerism," one especially notices Ford's barbed observation that "'southern writer' [is] an expression which limps from one 'critic' to the next, but which almost always is pejorative, hazy in its essentials, and frequently born out of a simple poverty of wit, and which generally means simply *like Faulkner*" (Ford, "Walker Percy," 561).

2. Michael Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 161; Ellis and Thompson, 114.

3. Richard Ford, *A Piece of My Heart* (1976; reprint, London: Harvill, 1996), 43-49. All subsequent page references will be incorporated into the main text.

4. Matthew Guinn, *After Southern Modernism: Fiction of the Contemporary South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 113-114; Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (1986; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 17.

See also Chapter 1.

5. William Faulkner, "Delta Autumn," in *Go Down, Moses* (1942; reprint, New York: Vintage, 1973), 364.

6. W. Kenneth Holditch, "On the Fine Edge of Disappearing: Desperation and Despair in *A Piece of My Heart*," in Huey Guagliardo, ed., *Perspectives on Richard Ford* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 36.

7. Holditch, 37.

8. Guinn, 113; Fred Hobson, *Tell About the South: the Southern Rage to Explain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983).

9. Among Southern literary intertexts, one also recalls Eudora Welty's "Death of a Traveling Salesman," a story that Jan Nordby Gretlund rightly identifies as "Welty's clearest statement in support of basic Agrarian ideas." "Desperately dislocated" and unable to relate to "country people who ignore his usual cash approach," Bowman is "the antithesis" of the subsistence farmer Sonny. However, that Newel's father was clearly no Bowman--that Newel Sr. loved his itinerant sales job--challenges the neo-Agrarian "aesthetics of place" in Welty's story. The contrast also anticipates later works in which Ford interrogates the Weltyan worldview: see Chapter 6. Eudora Welty, "Death of a Traveling Salesman," in *A Curtain of Green* (1943; reprint, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1947), 168-183, and Jan Nordby Gretlund, *Eudora Welty's Aesthetics of Place* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994), 49-51, 56.

10. Ford's own father was a travelling starch salesman, and the Ford family was similarly peripatetic. Ford's 1987 essay "My Mother, In Memory" recounts a scene that is strikingly similar to, yet significantly differs from, Newel's memory of the flat tire on the Vicksburg bridge:

A flat tire we all three had, halfway across the Mississippi bridge at Greenville. High up there, over the river. We stayed in the car while my father fixed it, and my mother held me so tightly to her I could barely breathe. I was six. She always said, "I smothered you when you were little. You were all we had. I'm sorry" [...] But I wasn't sorry. It seemed fine then, since we were up there. "Smothering" meant "Here is danger," "Love protects you."

Ford recalls the *love* that his family members felt and expressed to one another, for all their economic and geographic instability. In the novel, Newel dramatises the similar scenario as a nightmare of (his own) Southern history. Ford, "My Mother, In Memory," *Harper's* 275 (August 1987), 48.

11. McMurtry, 16, Kreyling, 110.

12. Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer* (1961; reprint, London: Minerva, 1995), 191.

13. McMurtry, 18.

14. Kreyling, 106.

15. Edward Dupuy, "The Confessions of an Ex-Suicide: Relenting and Recovering in Richard Ford's *The Sportswriter*," *Southern Literary Journal*, 23, no. 1 (Fall 1990), 95 and passim; Walker Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (1983; London: Arena, 1984), 77-78.

16. Percy, *The Moviegoer*, 10.

17. Nick Hornby, *Contemporary American Fiction* (New York: SMJ, 1992), 94.
18. Frank W. Shelton, "Richard Ford (1944-)" in Joseph M. Flora and Robert Bain, eds., *Contemporary Fiction Writers of the South: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 150.
19. Hornby, 97; Ford, "Walker Percy," 564.
20. Richard Ford, "An Urge for Going: Why I Don't Live Where I Used to Live," *Harper's* 284 (February 1992), 61.
21. Ford, "Walker Percy," 562.
22. McMurtry, 18.

## Chapter 5

1. Richard Ford, *The Sportswriter* (1986; reprint, London: Harvill, 1996), 9-10; Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer* (1961; reprint, London: Minerva, 1995), 7. On the relation between these two novels, see Nick Hornby, *Contemporary American Fiction* (New York: SMJ, 1992), 97, and Fred Hobson, *The Southern Writer in the Postmodern World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 55. All subsequent references to *The Sportswriter* will be incorporated into the main text.
2. If there is a (post)southern literary echo here, it is, as Fred Hobson has noted, of Percy's epigram to *The Last Gentleman*: "If a man cannot forget, he will never amount to much" (Søren Kierkegaard). See Hobson, 55.
3. Jeffrey Folks, "The Risks of Membership: Richard Ford's *The Sportswriter*," *Mississippi Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (Winter 1998-1999), 80; Percy, *The Moviegoer*, 27. As Folks hints, and as with the figure of Sam Newel in *A Piece of My Heart* (see Chapter 3, note 10), autobiographical experience can be identified in Ford's depiction of Frank. In his essay "My Mother, In Memory," Ford echoes Frank's description of his parents' "ordinary, modern existence." He states that "[w]e were not a family for whom history had much to offer," before proceeding to describe the kind of son-of-a-travelling-salesman life that Newel agonised over. Ford writes: "I think they were just caught up in their life, a life in the South, in the thirties, just a kind of swirling thing that didn't really have a place to go. There must've been plenty of lives like that then. It seems a period now to me. A specific time, the Depression. But to them, of course, it was just their life." Ford, "My Mother, in Memory," *Harper's* 275 (August 1987), 46.

One downside of Frank's coming of age in Mississippi during the late 1950s/early 1960s is his failure to relate to, or textually refer to, the civil rights movement. Only his observation that "[o]ne Negro even taught" (32) at Lonesome Pines obliquely suggests the fraught social context of civil rights-era Mississippi. Though Frank's experience reveals a different (post-) South, he is (and will be throughout *The Sportswriter*) withdrawn from the public-political sphere. See also note 31, below.

4. Robert Penn Warren, *A Place to Come to* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1977), 95, 7; Percy quoted in Lewis Lawson, *Still Following Percy* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 14-15. Though Frank would have no truck with Percy's upper-class country club. As Folks notes, Frank disapproves of "the country club milieu" (Folks 85) of X's (Michigan) family. Frank has not always been averse to performing "southernness." Frank recalls how, at the University of Michigan, he "tried to look like the boy everyone would want to ask to join [the fraternity]: the silent, slender southern boy with eyes older than his years, something already jaded and over-experienced about him. Just the one we need" (140). Compare Jed Tewksbury "play[ing] the role of Southerner to the hilt" at the University of Chicago (Warren, *A Place to Come to*, 22).

5. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 5 and *passim*. Frank's reference to *Blue Autumn's* "flashbacks" signals another level of postsouthern parody: Ford is acknowledging the failings of *his* debut. Undermining *A Piece of My Heart's* parody of Newel's pseudo-literary "burden of southern history" is Ford's mannered use of modernist, Faulknerian "flashbacks"—although, as Hobson has noted (44), this technique owes as much to Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925).

6. Hobson, 52; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 17.

7. Walker Percy, "Why I Live Where I Live," in Patrick Samway, ed., *Signposts in a Strange Land* (London: Bellew, 1991), 3-6.

8. In the early 1980s, Ford himself wrote briefly for *Inside Sports* magazine.

9. Huey Guagliardo, "A Conversation with Richard Ford," *Southern Review*, 34, no. 3 (Summer 1998), 617.

10. Michael Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 161.

11. The "southerner-in-exile" is memorably personified by Fincher Barksdale, the "slew-footed mainstreet change jingler in awful clothes" with a "New South" mink ranch in Memphis (75).
12. Scott Romine, "Where is Southern Literature?: The Practice of Place in a Postsouthern Age," *Critical Survey* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 20, and *The Narrative Forms of Southern Community* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 206; Kay Bonetti, "An Interview with Richard Ford," *The Missouri Review* 10, no. 2 (1987), 94; Joseph Urgo, "Faulkner's Real Estate: Land and Literary Speculation in *The Hamlet*," *Mississippi Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (Summer 1995), 452.
13. Urgo, 452.
14. Edward Dufuy, "The Confessions of an Ex-Suicide: Relenting and Recovering in Richard Ford's *The Sportsman*," *Southern Literary Journal* 23, no.1 (Fall 1990), 98.
15. Joel Garreau, *The Nine Nations of North America* (New York: Avon, 1981), 65-66.
16. Matthew Guinn, *After Southern Modernism: Fiction of the Contemporary South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 131; Percy, *The Moviegoer*, 127, 156. In fact, Ford has offered very sceptical opinions about Thoreau and his "sense of place." See Bonetti, 81, and Chapter 6, note 24.
17. Percy, *The Moviegoer*, 5; Ford, "Heartbreak Motels," *Harper's* 279 (August 1989), 13.
18. Walker Percy *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (1983; London: Arena, 1984), 113, 120, and "Why I Live Where I Live," 5: "There is a species of consumption at work here. Places are consumed nowadays."
19. Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1900; reprint, Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1986), 9-10.
20. Hobson, 49; John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).
21. Percy, *The Moviegoer*, 192.
22. David Harvey, quoted in Fredric Jameson, "The Brick and the Balloon: Architecture, Idealism and Land Speculation," *New Left Review* 228 (March/April 1998), 43.
23. Hornby, 101; Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 131-135.
24. John Carlos Fowe, "The Economics of the Body in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*," in Lynda S. Boren and Sara DeSaussure Davis, eds., *Kate Chopin Reconsidered: Beyond the Bayou* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 124.

25. Folks, 83.
26. Guinn, 121-122.
27. Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 103.
28. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 40-41.
29. Charles Ruthesier, *Imagining Atlanta: the Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* (New York: Verso, 1996), 163.
30. By the late 1980s, central Detroit's unemployment rate was 36%, compared to 12% in the metropolitan area and a national average of 6-7%. See Zukin, 104-105.
31. As an adult, Frank remains ignorant of larger socio-political processes (see also note 3, above). For example, when Delia Deffeyes asks his opinion on "what our government's doing to the poor people in Central America," Frank responds blankly that "I've been out of town a couple of days, Dee" (217). Frank's inability to remember who is the president--he confuses Ronald Reagan with another actor, Richard Chamberlain (218)--may suggest that Frank's complacent immanence in the capitalist landscapes of postsouthern America has spilled over into Reaganite amnesia/ignorance about the United States' imperialist activities beyond its national borders.
32. Dupuy, 102.
33. Folks, 83.
34. Dupuy, 102.
35. Dupuy, 103.
36. Hobson, 51.
37. Kreyling, 155.

## Chapter 6

1. Richard Ford, *Independence Day* (1995; London: Harvill, 1996), 91. All subsequent page references will be incorporated into the main text.
2. Walker Percy, "Why I Live Where I Live," in Patrick Samway, ed., *Signposts in a Strange Land* (London: Bellew, 1991), 5, and *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (1983; London: Arena, 1984), 113.
3. Richard Ford, *The Sportswriter* (1986; reprint, London: The Harvill Press, 1995), 372.

4. Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989) 131.
5. Jeffrey Folks, "The Risks of Membership: Richard Ford's *The Sportswriter*," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 52, no.1 (Winter 1998 -1999), 86-87; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117; Soja, 118-137 passim, especially 131.
6. Julius Rowan Raper, "Inventing Modern Southern Fiction: A Postmodern View," *Southern Literary Journal*, 22, no. 2 (Spring 1990), 10, 3.
7. Ford, *The Sportswriter*, 121.
8. In *Postmodern Geographies*, Soja notes how Henri Lefebvre distinguished between "Nature as naively given context and what can be termed 'second nature,' the transformed and socially concretized spatiality arising from the application of purposeful human labour" (80). As we have already seen, the "purposeful human labour" of the Cape Verdean and Honduran immigrants has been reified as part of the "second nature" of Haddam.
9. Ford, *The Sportswriter*, 58-59.
10. Robert Penn Warren, "Literature as a Symptom," in Herbert Agar and Allen Tate, eds., *Who Owns America?* (1936; reprint, Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 273.
11. Donald Davidson, "Still Rebels, Still Yankees," in *Still Rebels, Still Yankees and Other Essays* (1957; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 232-234.
12. Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1985; reprint, New York: Perennial, 1986), 72, 11.
13. Eudora Welty, "Some Notes on River Country," in *The Eye of the Story* (1979; reprint, London: Virago, 1987), 286; Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer* (1961; reprint, London: Minerva, 1995), 85; David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), 320.
14. Barbara Ehrenreich, "Realty Bites," *New Republic*, 18-25 September 1995, 50; Matthew Guinn, *After Southern Modernism: Fiction of the Contemporary South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 134.
15. De Certeau, xiii-xiv.
16. Ford, *The Sportswriter*, 56; Guinn, 134.



17. Donald Davidson quoted in Virginia Rock, "Twelve Southerners: Biographical Essays," in *Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand* (1930; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 373-374; Harvey, 55; Ford, *The Sportswriter*, 56.

18. De Certeau, xx, 91.

19. Frank terms O'Dell a "literal-as-a-dictionary architect" (99) and calls Ann a "bedrock literalist [...] which is why I'm sure she married Charley" (103). Evidently, Frank favours literalism less in *Independence Day* than he did in *The Sportswriter*.

20. De Certeau, 38-39.

21. Soja, 177; Guinn, 132.

22. Frank states explicitly that: "'Community' is actually one of those words I loathe, since all its hands-on implications are dubious" (386).

23. Sophie Majeski, "Richard Ford: The *Salon* Interview,"

<http://www.salon1999.com/weekly/interview960708.html>

24. In a short essay on "Sense of Place," Ford has written: "I would say against Thoreau that places--mountains, street corners, skylines, riverbanks--do not speak, have no essences which can be 'captured,' heard. They are intransigent, mute, specific, and that is enough." See Ford, "S.O.P.," *Aperture* 127 (Spring 1992), 64.

25. Ford, *The Sportswriter*, 85; Ford quoting Emerson, Majeski,

<http://www.salon1999.com/weekly/interview960708.html>

26. Fred Hobson, *The Southern Writer in the Postmodern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 50, 42, 57; Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos*, 120; John Crowe Ransom, "Reconstructed But Unregenerate," in *I'll Take My Stand*, 5.

27. Charles Reagan Wilson, "Place, Sense of" in Wilson and William Ferris, eds., *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 1137. Frank also refutes the myth--perpetuated by the black twins, Everick and Wardell, who do manual work for the realty firm--that a white Southerner like himself will inevitably "possess a truer instinct for members of their race than any white northerner could ever approximate" (33).

28. For Shut Off, Louisiana, see Percy, *The Last Gentleman* (1966; reprint, New York: Ivy, 1989), 273. See Chapter 5 for Ford's explanation that *The Sportswriter's* scathing criticism of New Orleans was "an answering knell" to *The Last Gentleman's* implication that Michigan is a "non-place."

29. Warren quoted in Louis Rubin, ed. *The American South: Portrait of a Culture* (Washington: Voice of America Forum Series, 1979), 327.
30. Ford, "Walker Percy," 562.
31. Welty's remark on "real estate people" appears in Rubin, ed., *The American South*, 80.
32. Ford, "Walker Percy," 561.
33. From Ford's contribution to "A Stubborn Sense of Place," *Harper's*, August 1986, 43. Among the "Southern writers" participating, Ford was by far the most sceptical about "Southern literature," "the South" and its supposedly "stubborn sense of place."

## Chapter 7

1. Ellen Douglas, "Neighborhoods," reprinted in Marion Barnwell, ed., *A Place Called Mississippi: Collected Narratives* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1997), 456-457.
2. Manuel Castells, *The Informational City* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 311; Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* (New York: Verso, 1996), 163.
3. Tom Wolfe quoted in Don O'Brian, "Looking for Atlanta," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 30 October 1998, K1.
4. Rutheiser, 22.
5. William Gleason, *The Leisure Ethic: Work and Play in American Literature, 1840-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 309-310; Rutheiser, 31, 36.
6. Donald Davidson, *Southern Writers in the Modern World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1958), 1; John Crowe Ransom, "Reconstructed but Unregenerate," in *Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 20, 17.
7. Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (1936; reprint, London: Pan Books, 1974), 38. All subsequent page references will be incorporated into the main text.
8. See Kenneth O'Brien, "Race, Romance, and the Southern Literary Tradition," in Darden Asbury Pyron, ed., *Recasting: Gone with the Wind in American Culture* (Miami: University Presses of Florida, 1983), 164. See also Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Scarlett O'Hara and the Two Quentin Compsons," 90; and Richard H. King, "The 'Simple Story's' Ideology: *Gone with the Wind* and the New South Creed," 170-171. During the war itself, Scarlett inherits (from Charles Hamilton) real

estate in and beyond Atlanta: "half of Aunt Pitty's house but farm lands and town property as well. And the stores and warehouses along the railroad track near the depot, which were part of her inheritance, had tripled in value since the war began" (152-153). It is never clear what happens to the "farm lands and town property." Ultimately however, Scarlett's postwar wealth derives from producing and selling construction materials, rather than property ownership per se.

9. Rubin, 89; Richard Ford, *Independence Day* (1995; London: Harvill, 1996), 44.

10. King, 170.

11. I do not mean that she fetishises Tara as a commodity. Rather, despite her oft-stated distaste for the Lost Cause, Scarlett romances Tara as a remnant of antebellum life in much the same way ex-Confederates turn the Cause itself into "a fetish" (856) (objectified through graves, battlefields, flags, sabres, letters, even the veterans themselves).

12. Scarlett is a much more successful New Southerner than the wartime mercenary Rhett who, at the end of the novel, is primed to return to his family in Charleston--tellingly, one of those Old Southern cities that Scarlett so disliked. It is also notable that, unlike Scarlett, Rhett has no material attachment to Atlanta real estate (except, of course, their gaudy marital home). Because "[y]ou can't hide real estate very easily" (837), Rhett put his money in bonds rather than property.

13. Richard Dwyer, "The Case of the Cool Reception," in Pyron, ed., 29; Malcolm Cowley, "Going with the Wind," Pyron, ed., 19; Pyron, "Preface," in Pyron, ed., 9.

14. Ransom, "Fiction Harvest," *Southern Review* 2 (Autumn 1936), 407, and "Reconstructed but Unregenerate," 1; King, 170; Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (1962; reprint, Harmondsworth: Peregrine Books, 1969), 66 and 218-245.

15. Richard Gray, *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region* (1986; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 145.

16. Rutheiser, 295, note 120.

17. Rutheiser, 41; Darden Asbury Pyron, "The Inner War of Southern History," 186, and "Preface," in ed. Pyron, ix; Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City, 1946-1996* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1996), 26-27.

18. Flannery O'Connor, "A Late Encounter With the Enemy," in *The Complete Stories* (1971; reprint, London: Faber & Faber, 1990), 136.

19. O'Connor, "The Artificial Nigger," in *The Complete Stories*, 251. All subsequent page references will be incorporated into the main text.
20. H.R. Stoneback, "'Sunk in the Cornfield with His Family': Sense of Place in O'Connor's 'The Displaced Person,'" *Mississippi Quarterly*, 36, no. 4 (Fall 1983), 547, 555. For a brief discussion of the racialised "rural/urban dichotomy" in "The Artificial Nigger," see Rutheiser, 50-51.
21. Lewis P. Simpson, *The Brazen Face of History: Studies in the Literary Consciousness of America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 248; O'Connor, "The Displaced Person," in *The Complete Stories*, 214.
22. *Brightleaf: A Southern Review of Books*, 2, no. 1 (Winter 1998), 50; Donald Windham, "Afterword," in *The Dog Star* (1950; reprint, Athens: Hill Street Press, 1998), 225-226. All subsequent page references will be incorporated into the main text.
23. Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 131.
24. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 16-17.
25. Rutheiser, 49. The term "power structure" was first used by Hunter in his influential *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1953). Hunter showed how the decision makers in Atlanta's political and commercial affairs came from a privileged elite of wealthy white businessmen. See Allen, 39.
26. William S. Ellis, "Atlanta, Pacesetter City of the South," *National Geographic*, 135, no. 2 (February 1969), 249, 250; Spalding's article, from the 4 April 1965 *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* magazine, is quoted in Allen, 136.
27. See Rutheiser 66, 190
28. Bradley Rice, "Searching for the Sunbelt," in Raymond A. Mohl, ed., *Searching for the Sunbelt: Historical Perspectives on a Region* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 219. Goldfield quoted in Rice, 218.
29. Rutheiser, 165, 180-181; Erla Zwingle, "Atlanta: Energy and Optimism in the New South," *National Geographic*, 174, no. 1 (July 1988), 6; Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), ix.
30. Rutheiser, 11; Truman A. Hartshorn et al, *Metropolis in Georgia: Atlanta's Rise as a Major Transaction Center* (Cambridge, Mass: Ballinger, 1976), 14; Shister quoted in Numan V. Bartley, *The*

*Creation of Modern Georgia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 225; Rutheiser, 180-181. For Lytle on "the absentee-landlordism of capitalism," see Chapter 1.

31. Rutheiser, 72; Portman quoted in Allen, 169; Rutheiser, 161, 163; Allen, 243.

32. Rutheiser, 4, 6-7.

33. Rutheiser, 5, 6, 98, 52; Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising: How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics and Culture* (1996; New York: Harvest, 1997), 26.

34. Garreau, *The Nine Nations of North America* (New York: Avon Books, 1981), 158-160, and *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York: Anchor, 1991), xxiii, 4, 14, xxiii.

35. Garreau, *Edge City*, 156, 145, 156, 154, 162. See also Rutheiser, 63, on how a third of all black households in Atlanta lived in poverty by 1990 (double the number in 1980).

36. Rutheiser, 3.

37. Walker Percy, "Going Back to Georgia," in Patrick Samway, ed., *Signposts in a Strange Land* (London: Bellew, 1991), 26, 28, 31; Rutheiser, 71.

38. Percy, "Novel Writing in an Apocalyptic Time," in *Signposts*, 166-167, and "Going Back to Georgia," 31.

39. C. Hugh Holman, "The View from the Regency-Hyatt," in *The Roots of Southern Writing: Essays on the Literature of the American South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), 96, 99, 106-107.

40. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 93; Holman, 107.

41. Julius Rowan Raper, "Inventing Modern Southern Fiction: A Postmodern View," *Southern Literary Journal*, 22, no. 2 (Spring 1990) 9-10, 17 (see also Chapter 2); John Lowe, "Introduction," in Lowe and Jefferson Humphries, eds., *The Future of Southern Letters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3-4. Lowe's introduction does passingly cite the city while discussing the literary significance of "sex-grits-and-skyscrapers paperbacks with titles like *Atlanta*." Lowe moves on, yet such "schlock productions" can at least claim to narrate a contemporary Atlanta (5-6). Lowe also mentions Anne Rivers Siddons' *Peachtree Road* (6); see Chapter 8.

42. Rutheiser, 14; Carl Abbott, "New West, New South, New Region: The Discovery of the Sunbelt," in Mohl, ed., 16.

43. Doreen Massey, "A Global Sense of Place," *Marxism Today*, June 1991; reprinted in Barnes, Trevor and Dick Gregory, eds., *Reading Human Geography: The Poetics and Politics of Inquiry* (London: Arnold, 1997), 24-29.

## Chapter 8

1. John Lowe, "Introduction," in *The Future of Southern Letters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5-7. The only published "academic" article about Siddons' work is Lamar York's 1986 survey of Siddons' first three novels. *Peachtree Road* was Siddons' fifth novel, and her second set in Atlanta: see also the horror story *The House Next Door* (1978).

2. Bob Summer, "Peachtree Road is Journey Through Modern Atlanta," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 16 October 1988, M10; Pat Conroy quoted on cover of Anne Rivers Siddons, *Peachtree Road: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (1988; reprint, New York: HarperPaperbacks, 1998). All subsequent page references will be incorporated into the main text.

3. In a 1986 interview, Siddons explained that "sense of place" had been crucial to Southern writers like her by trotting out the familiar references to the Confederacy's defeat and the burden of Reconstruction. See Don O'Briant, "Profile on Peachtree," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 26 January 1986, M4.

4. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (1962; reprint, Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1969), 15; Fred Pfeil, "Fiction After History," in *Another Tale to Tell: Politics and Narrative in Postmodern Culture* (London: Verso, 1990), 50-51; Lukács, 18.

5. bell hooks, "Homeplace: a site of resistance," in *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 42.

6. Patricia Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 226. Yaeger discusses Ellen Gilchrist's "The President of the Louisiana Live Oak Society," in which "Robert's parents live in a house built from and dependent on the capital [...] wrestled from the ghetto, and yet they define themselves as utterly self-reliant."

7. Gary M. Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: A Saga of Race and Family* (1996; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1997), 526. Allen's Six-Point Plan as "summed up in one piece of literature later published by the Chamber of Commerce" is reprinted in Ivan Allen and Paul Hemphill,

*Mayor: Notes on the Sixties* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 32-34. Siddons met Ivan Allen at a party shortly after the publication of *Peachtree Road*. The ex-mayor complemented Siddons on her novel, but cautioned that "it wasn't a 'Five-Point Plan' I had as mayor, it was a 'Six-Point Plan'" (Pomerantz, 526-27). Perhaps Siddons was too polite to point out that, on this detail, *Peachtree Road* was an accurate fictional "reflection" of historical reality.

8. David M. Smith, *Inequality in an American City: Atlanta, Georgia, 1960-1970*: Occasional Paper No. 17, Department of Geography, Queen Mary College, University of London, January 1981, 51, 48; Clarence N. Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent: System Bias in the Urban Renewal Program of Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1976), 177-178; Smith, 48.

9. Stone, *Economic Growth*, 177-178; Ivan Allen, 155-156; Smith, 53. The "conservative businessmen" objected to funds being spent on public housing; the "real estate interests" feared they would lose potential commissions and profits from private development.

10. On "Negro removal," see Rutheiser, 154, and Stone, *Regime Politics*, 68. Black civil rights organisations such as the Urban League tended to support the razing of slum areas with the "implicit stipulation [...] that replacement housing would be provided" (Stone, *Regime Politics*, 63).

11. Smith, 52; Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City, 1946-1996* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1996), 162; Smith, 51; Ivan Allen, 33, 152.

12. "Major league city" was Allen's favourite sporting synonym for "national city" (Pomerantz, 340). "During 1964 we had the nation's second greatest gain in the primary index of growth: new construction" (Ivan Allen 130).

13. Rutheiser, 154; Stone, *Regime Politics*, 70.

14. Frederick Allen, 149; Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1984), 9.

15. Hosea Williams quoted in Pomerantz, 348; Lukács, 80. David Harvey describes how "urban spectacle[s]" in the 1960s included "[c]ivil rights demonstrations, street riots, and inner city uprisings" deriving from "the seething mill of urban discontent that whirled around the base of modernist urban renewal and housing projects." See Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 88.

16. Rutheiser remarks wryly that: "In a rhetorical turn that gives a rather literal twist to [Joseph] Schumpeter's notion of 'creative destruction,' the sacking of Atlanta [by Sherman] is now ritually

invoked as point of reference and justification for every municipally sanctioned spasm of demolition and displacement" (19).

17. On historical continuities in Atlanta's politics of place, see Rutheiser, 5, and Chapter 7, above.

18. Rutheiser, 123-124.

19. This emphasis on historical *discontinuities* "generically" (ideologically) defines *Peachtree Road* as a "historical novel" in the classic sense "insofar as it offers (or purports to offer) us no less than the inner experiential feel of times [the Allen era], spaces [residential Buckhead], and perceptual modes [the benevolent worldview of the white power structure] far different, decisively Other, from our own" (Pfeil, 51).

20. Summer, M10. By the late 1970s, the ex-mayor is afflicted by amnesia--perhaps a suitable symbol, or repressed revelation, of the novel's "forgetful" omission of Buckhead's redevelopment during the 1960s.

21. Rutheiser, 186, 182; Frederick Allen, 232. However, it should be noted that Gibby mentions both Andrew Young *and* Glenn Pickens as "young lieutenants" (459) to Martin Luther King during the 1960s. In his perceptive review of the novel, Phil Garner observed that: "When it's time to deal with Atlanta's first black mayor, Maynard Jackson [1974-1982], Siddons chooses to fictionalize him and his times virtually out of existence." See *Atlanta Magazine*, December 1988, 62.

22. Mayor Young often claimed that his vision of "Public Purpose Capitalism" and "private-public partnership" derived from previous mayors, including Ivan Allen. Indeed, Young praised Allen for transforming Atlanta into a "Big League city" through the construction of Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium. But (New Orleans-born) Young never had a white "mentor" like Allen. See "Andrew Young's State of the City Address, 1989," in Paul D. Escott and David Goldfield, eds., *Major Problems in the History of the American South: Volume II: The New South* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1990), 621-622.

23. Gibby does eventually sell the Bondurant house to Carter Rawson (815). However, Gibby does not sell because Pickens will no longer uphold the zoning restrictions, or because the \$3m per acre offers for 2500 Peachtree Road have become irresistible. Gibby sells to spite his Aunt Willa, the sole remaining sentient occupant of the house, for Willa's lifelong mis-treatment of her late daughter Lucy.



24. We never learn whether or not the Bondurant family still owns the Pumphouse Hill property in the late 1980s. In the 1990s, history repeated itself when the city built the Olympic stadium in Summerhill.

25. Siddons, "The Maturing of a City: Atlanta Comes of Age," in Dudley Clendinen, ed., *The Prevailing South: Life and Politics in a Changing Culture* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1988), 146, 145; Garner, 63.

26. Frederick Allen identifies the first published reference to Atlanta's supposed "international" status in a 1964 *Atlanta* article. *Atlanta* claimed that the new stadium would "complete the transformation of Atlanta from a semi-Southern to a full-fledged national and international city" (137). Anne Rivers' name first appears as a senior editor of *Atlanta* in the December 1964 issue. In the March 1965 issue, she contributed a cover story on the city's building boom.

27. Anne Rivers Siddons. *Downtown* (1994; London: Warner Books, 1995), 142, 76. All subsequent page references will be incorporated into the main text.

28. Frederick Allen, 142, 128; Stone, *Regime Politics*, 73, and Rutheiser, 154.

29. I am adapting this term from Tim Crimmins' work on the "palimpsestuous" historical geographies of Atlanta. See Crimmins, "The Atlanta Palimpsest: Stripping Away the Layers of the Past," *Atlanta Historical Journal* 26 (1982), 13-32.

30. See Don O'Briant, "Anne Rivers Siddons: Novelist counting on new surroundings to refresh her writing," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 25 June 1998, D1; and O'Briant, "Siddons: I don't want to live in this mess," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 25 May 1997, K3. Siddons told O'Briant that "I gravitate now to the graceful, slower, older cities that won't change like Charleston or Savannah." Compare with Scarlett's opinion that "Atlanta couldn't possibly be so boring as Charleston and Savannah had been." Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (1936; reprint, London: Pan, 1974), 139.

## Chapter 9

1. Quote from *Publishers Weekly* on the back cover of Tom Wolfe, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987; London: Picador, 1990).

2. Maria Saporta, "ACVB to welcome author of new controversial book," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (hereafter *AJC*) 27 October 1998, B3; former city planning director Leon Eplan quoted

in Don O'Briant, "A WOLFE AT OUR DOOR?: Writer's friends say Atlanta will emerge unscathed from new novel about race and real estate," *AJC*, 24 September 1998, D1; John Shelton Reed, review of *A Man in Full*, *Southern Cultures* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1999), <http://www.unc.edu/depts/csas/socult/revs/sc52rev1.htm>; Nelson George quoted in Don O'Briant, "Full visit: Lots of dining, no whining: Where's the mayor? Bill Campbell has been noticeably absent at Wolfe gatherings," *AJC*, 20 November 1998, G6.

3. Saporta, B3; O'Briant, "A WOLFE AT OUR DOOR?," D1.

4. Reed, <http://www.unc.edu/depts/csas/socult/revs/sc52rev1.htm>; Don O'Briant, "Looking for Atlanta," *AJC*, 30 October 1998, K1.

5. O'Briant, "Looking for Atlanta," K1; O'Briant, "'Full' visit," G6.

6. Rutheiser, 77.

7. All of the main protagonists in *A Man in Full*, barring Charlie's ex-wife Martha, are male. Hence, ways of seeing Atlanta in the novel are expressed through what the feminist geographer Gillian Rose has termed "the masculine gaze." I emphasise that this masculine gaze is much more powerful--indeed, proprietorial--when augmented by economic power. See Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), Chapter 5.

8. Tom Wolfe, *A Man in Full* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), 68. All subsequent page references will be incorporated into the main text.

9. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 4-5,

44. Portman co-authored the tellingly titled *The Architect as Developer* (1976).

10. Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York: Anchor, 1991), 3.

11. David Harvey quoted in Fredric Jameson, "The Brick and the Balloon: Architecture, Idealism and Land Speculation," *New Left Review* 228 (March/April 1998), 43; Andrew Lytle, "The Hind Tit," in *Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand* (1930; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 211, 243.

12. Walker Percy, "Novel Writing in an Apocalyptic Time," in Patrick Samway, ed., *Signposts in a Strange Land* (London: Bellew, 1991), 166-167.

13. Land speculation on the rural, northern fringe of metropolitan Atlanta in the 1990s was such that one developer secured options on one-fifth of the land in Paulding County. Development also

included “the construction of high-priced luxury housing” in “the longtime Klan stronghold” of Forsyth County. See Rutheiser, 77.

14. Jameson, “The Brick and the Balloon,” 26.

15. Wolfe may have based PlannersBanc’s troubles with Croker on the “non-performing” real estate loan crisis on at Citizens & Southern Bank in 1978. The crisis derived from “the wide-open days when every officer in the bank was authorized to lend the legal maximum of \$10 million without so much as a supervisor’s okay.” See Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City, 1946-1996* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1996), 203.

16. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967; reprint, New York: Zone Books, 1995).

17. “Symbolic capital” is Pierre Bourdieu’s term. See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989) on how symbolic capital, as “the collection of luxury goods attesting the taste and distinction of the owner,” is actually transformed “money capital.” I would qualify that, while PlannersBanc Tower does attest to “the taste and distinction of the owner,” the building does not work “deliberately to conceal,” but rather flagrantly advertises (to customers like Charlie), the bank’s “money capital” resources (Harvey, 77-78).

18. Jameson, “Brick and the Balloon,” 25; see also 44 on the “abstract dimension or materialist sublimation of finance capital” in postmodern glass towers.

19. Fredric Jameson, “Culture and Finance Capital,” in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998), 142; David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 246.

20. Jameson, “Culture and Finance Capital,” 142; Manuel Castells, *The Informational City* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 348, 311.

21. Castells, 310, 339; Allen Tate, “Notes on Liberty and Property,” in Herbert Agar and Tate, eds., *Who Owns America?* (1936; reprint, Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 84.

22. Castells, 171, 169-170, 346. See Rutheiser, 125, on Atlanta’s “Manhattanization.”

23. Rather aptly, PlannersBanc’s international investments are never geographically located, but Peepgass’ stewardship of a \$4.1bn loan package for Finnish government bonds (161) gives a hint of the extent and value of such investments.

24. Brian Jarvis, *Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture* (London: Pluto, 1998), 46, 48; Reed, <http://www.unc.edu/depts/csas/socult/revs/sc52rev1.htm>.

25. Reed, <http://www.unc.edu/depts/csas/socult/revs/sc52rev1.htm>; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 93.
26. V.S. Naipaul, *A Turn in the South* (London: Penguin, 1989), 29.
27. Anne Rivers Siddons, *Peachtree Road* (1988; reprint, New York: HarperPaperbacks, 1998), 533.
28. On the “performative resignification” of Atlanta, including Cain Street’s rebranding as International Boulevard, see Chapter 7.
29. In *Peachtree Road*, Gibby Bondurant offers a strikingly similar description of the poor, black neighbourhoods he witnesses during his mayoral tour. See Siddons, 536.
30. Rutheiser, 6.
31. See James Baldwin, *Evidence of Things Not Seen* (London: Michael Joseph, 1985), 25-26, 37-38.
32. Rutheiser, 82. Rutheiser takes the term “autopolis” from H.L. Preston, *Automobile Age Atlanta: The Making of a Southern Metropolis* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975). O’Briant, “A Wolfe at Our Door?,” D1.
33. Valerie Boyd, “Toni Morrison brings friend’s *Bones* to Print,” *AJC*, 17 October 1999, <http://www.accessatlanta.com/partners/ajc/newsatlanta/bambara/morrison1.html>
34. Rutheiser, 88-89.
35. Rutheiser, 88.
36. De Certeau, 98, 101.
37. See Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*, 335. On the harrowing experiences of the chicken broiler industry’s underpaid and generally non-white workforce, see also Jennifer Smith, “Workers demand ‘poultry justice,’” *Creative Loafing*, 15 April 2000, 27. (*Creative Loafing* is a free weekly newspaper published in Atlanta.)
38. Allen Tate, “What is a ‘Traditional Society?’” in *Essays of Four Decades* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1968), 548; Harry Ritchie, “Tom Wolfe in Full,” *The Waterstone’s Magazine*, 15 (Autumn 1998), 4. One of the friends who showed Wolfe around Georgia plantations was developer C. Mackenzie Taylor, co-founder of the Perimeter Center edge city that so engages Charlie’s gaze.
39. One might also note that, on an economic and performative scale, “Cap’m Charlie’s” conspicuous Southernness far exceeds that of the Cudworths in Robert Penn Warren’s *A Place to Come to* (see Chapter 3).

40. Richard H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 21.
41. Tellingly, Croker makes his final decision to "lay off 15 percent of the food division" (89) after catching a rattlesnake at Turpmtime, an incident that reaffirms his "Southern manhood."
42. Norman Mailer, "A Man Half Full," *New York Review of Books*, 17 December 1998, 20.
43. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 183.
44. King, 87.

## Chapter 10

1. Toni Cade Bambara, *Those Bones Are Not My Child* (New York: Pantheon, 1999), 8, 11-12. All subsequent page references will be incorporated into the main text.
2. Williams was charged with only two murders, and neither of these victims was a child. Upon Williams' conviction, the missing-and-murdered case was closed, though even the official list cited twenty-eight victims (alternative lists included many more names).
3. Charles Ruteiser, *Imagining Atlanta: the Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* (New York: Verso, 1996), 3, 11.
4. Another Gibby-like litany is explicitly satirised toward the end of the novel (630-631).
5. Tom Wolfe, *A Man in Full* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), 185, 183. See Chapter 9.
6. Fredric Jameson, "The Brick and the Balloon: Architecture, Idealism, and Land Speculation," *New Left Review* 228 (March/April 1998), 25.
7. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 405. Effaced, or, as we have already seen in the case of southwest Atlanta, simply ignored.
8. Fredric Jameson, "Culture and Finance Capital," in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998), 142; Ruteiser, 163; Joel Garreau, *The Nine Nations of North America* (New York: Avon, 1981), 158-160. It would be wrong, however, to define the Omni *only* as a site of capitalist abstraction. As James Baldwin noted in 1985, the Omni was a mere "five minutes away from a sprawling, poor black neighborhood, called Vine City." Identifying the intensely local, material uneven development between the "international city" and southwest Atlanta that Wolfe later mapped, Baldwin notes that "[a] child can walk here [to the Omni] from

his home in less than five minutes; some of the murdered children were last seen in this place.” James Baldwin, *Evidence of Things Not Seen* (London: Michael Joseph, 1985), 63.

9. For Bambara, an Atlanta resident, the production of *Those Bones Are Not My Child* itself was a written extension of this process of “naming” and placing oneself (as well as others) in the local community. Bambara’s Acknowledgements detail the origins of the novel in her role as the local community’s “writing lady” (671). She has said elsewhere that “[w]riting is a legitimate way, an important way, to participate in the empowerment of the community that names me.” Quoted in Farah Jasmine Griffin, “Toni Cade Bambara: Free To Be Anywhere in the Universe,” *Callaloo* 19, no. 2 (1996), 229-230.

10. Patricia Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women’s Writing, 1930-1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 12, 20, xi.

11. Jameson, “The Brick and the Balloon,” 46. In Chapter 3, I also quoted this notion of a “postmodern ghost story, ordered by finance-capital spectralities.” The distinction is that, in *The Moviegoer*, it is Binx (the storyteller, after all) who obfuscates the material reality of capitalist property development in and around New Orleans, narrating it as a “spirit.” In *Those Bones*, it is the spectre/“spirit” (i.e., the social process and profit motive) of finance capitalism itself that also de-realises and devalues black bodies and lives. Whereas Binx’s narrative deliberately mystified capitalist abstraction, the postmodern ghost stories told by the African-American community are *critical* of capitalist abstraction.

Though Jameson believes that the postmodern ghost story (configured through Jacques Derrida’s “hauntology”) might offer a way of critiquing the spectral, abstracting power of finance-capital itself, he worries that it “demands a narrative of the very search for a building to haunt in the first place” (46). It is therefore significant, even hopeful, that Sonny’s “ghost” haunts his own home, his own family, rather than the glass-walled, highly abstracted Omni. I say this while remaining aware of the problems raised by the novel’s denouement, in which the Spencers’ landlord Gittens is identified as Sonny’s abductor. This denouement also raises the possibility that the “bones on the roof” of the Spencer home may have been human (not animal). Thus the hopeful, “hauntological” sense of place that the Spencer home retains is complicated on two counts: firstly, that the house itself is a site of speculative exploitation—Gittens extracts rent from

the Spencers despite failing to maintain the building--and secondly, the house may even be a murder site.

12. Baldwin, 99; Yaeger, 17. Though Yaeger seems unaware, reverse autochthony also challenges Donald Davidson's "autochthonous ideal," which conceived the Southerner (specifically, the artist) in organic *harmony* with place.

13. Yaeger, 18.

14. This may be more than merely an image: the novel suggests that the missing-and-murdered case may be connected to *contemporary* plantations based on slave labour (600-601).

15. Don DeLillo, *The Body Artist* (London: Picador, 2001), 99.

16. Valerie Boyd, "Toni Morrison brings friend's *Bones* to Print," *AJC*, 17 October 1999,

<http://www.accessatlanta.com/partners/ajc/newsatlanta/bambara/morrison.html>; Mikhail

Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics," in Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogical Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

17. Yaeger, 224, 228.

18. Bambara quoted in Janelle Collins, "Generating Power: Fission, Fusion, and Postmodern Politics in Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*," *MELUS* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1996), 35; Bakhtin, 177; Yaeger, 221, 229.

19. Yaeger, 229.

20. John Lowe, "City of Torment," *The World and I*, 15, no. 2 (February 2000), 267-274; Toni Morrison, "City Limits, Village Values: Concepts of the Neighborhood in Black Fiction," in Michael C. Jaye and Ann Chalmers Watts, *Literature and the Urban Experience: Essays on the City and Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), 39.

21. One notes that again Zala is working in corporate Atlanta, and in the finance capitalist "space of flows" itself. However, one also notes that (unlike her co-workers) she retains a critical semi-autonomy from the "international city."

22. Baldwin, 2. Early on, before she knows Sonny has disappeared, Zala vaguely believes the child murders must be taking place in Alabama (41). As she later observes, "I kept telling myself it wasn't happening, not here. In Alabama or Mississippi maybe, but not here in Atlanta" (659).

23. Wolfe, 187, 202; C. Hugh Holman, "The View from the Regency Hyatt," in *The Roots of Southern Writing: Essays on the Literature of the American South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), 106-107. Zala also sees the Hyatt-Regency itself as "gaunt" (480). In doing so she perhaps captures the Hyatt's hermetic alienation from nearby southwest Atlanta, just as Frank Bascombe's use of the same adjective signalled the "disjunction from the surrounding city" of Detroit's Renaissance Center (another Portman project). See Chapter 5.

24. Doreen Massey, "A Global Sense of Place," in Trevor Barnes and Dick Gregory, eds., *Reading Human Geography: The Poetics and Politics of Inquiry* (London: Arnold, 1997), 321-323.

25. bell hooks, "Uniquely Toni Cade Bambara," *Black Issues Book Review* 2, no. 1 (January-February 2000), 16. For a depiction of solidarity between African-Americans and Jordanian and Vietnamese immigrants *within* Atlanta (and during the missing-and-murdered saga), see Bambara's rather slight short story "Madame Bai and the Taking of Stone Mountain" in *Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions: Fictions, Essays and Conversations* (New York: Pantheon, 1996), 27-44.

## Conclusion

1. David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 247; Scott Romine, "Where is Southern Literature?: The Practice of Place in a Postsouthern Age," *Critical Survey* 12, no. 1 (2001), 5-27.

2. C. Vann Woodward, "The Search for Southern Identity," in *The Burden of Southern History: Enlarged Edition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 23.

3. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 366.

4. Gerald W. Creed and Barbara Ching, "Recognizing Rusticity: Identity and the Power of Place," in Creed and Ching, eds., *Knowing Your Place: Rural Identity and Cultural Hierarchy* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 7, 10, 5.

5. Harry Crews, *A Childhood: The Biography of a Place* in *Classic Crews: A Harry Crews Reader* (New York: Touchstone, 1993), 26. All subsequent page references will be incorporated into the main text.

6. Matthew Guinn, *After Southern Modernism: Fiction of the Contemporary South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 13; Andrew Lytle, "The Hind Tit," in *Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University



Press, 1977), 244. In an interview with Erik Bledsoe, Crews expresses his appreciation of Lytle, but also notes that “we were from two very different Souths, and I don’t think he [Lytle] ever realized that. His daddy sent him to France to study. His daddy was a planter that never touched a plow, never had his hands on a plow or stock. My family was the white trash way down at the end of the road from the big house.” Such a starkly personal critique puts Lytle’s *theoretical* focus upon the yeoman farmer (as opposed to Stark Young’s emphasis upon the aristocratic planter) into sobering perspective. “An Interview with Harry Crews,” in Bledsoe, ed., *Perspectives on Harry Crews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 153.

7. Barbara Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 84; Allen Tate, “Remarks on the Southern Religion,” in *I’ll Take My Stand*, 156-157. All subsequent page references to *Prodigal Summer* will be incorporated into the main text.

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